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A PRISONER IN GERMANY

A PRISONER
IN
GERMANY

BY
ROBERT GUERLAIN

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PREFACE

AS THE WAR ENTERS THAT PERIOD IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING the inevitable collapse of the Nazi regime, the world will witness the emergence of a factor which has so far remained in the background. That factor is the prisoners of war interned in Germany.

Hitler has brought into his country millions of men who have borne arms against him, men whose hatred is fed and augmented daily by Nazi slavery. He has thrown these men together with other millions of "voluntary civilian workers", snatched from their homes in occupied countries and compelled to "collaborate" in the war effort of the Third Reich. He has put all this tremendous hostile army to work in factories and mines, farms and shipyards, lines of communication, where they are in constant contact with a German people already weary of a war beginning to turn against them, where they fraternize with workers, many of whom recall with longing a pre-Hitler era, and with political prisoners from concentration camps. By doing this, Hitler, himself enslaved and driven desperate by the insatiable needs of his war economy, has added to the explosive mixture already present in Germany the spark which some day will light a conflagration that will leave no trace of either him or his regime.

There has been little talk on this subject until now, mostly because public opinion has traditionally considered the problem of war prisoners to be of interest solely to the families concerned and to the Red Cross. But in this war the number of prisoners is so enormous that the problem has long since ceased to be one of pure philanthropy. In a war whose totality embraces, implicates, and devastates every aspect of social existence, a war from which nothing or no one can escape, the presence of innumerable millions of Allied soldiers on enemy territory, their presence under conditions of slavery, presents many problems that bear no

relation to philanthropy. May we not therefore presume that this situation involves certain implications of future significance, certain results that are bound to clash with the plans of those who today are mounting guard over these millions?

The author, a French soldier taken prisoner by the Germans during the battle of the Somme, spent more than a year in one of the vast prison camps in Germany. The story here told is not in the form of a captive's memoirs set down in the customary reportorial style. Because of certain reasons imposed upon him by the fear of endangering friends still captive in Germany or members of the camp's personnel, the author has been obliged to clothe his account with some degree of vagueness in order to prevent the German secret service from finding the clues for which it will be searching. Furthermore, in the hope of not overloading the narrative with descriptive details common to prison camps in every country and in every modern war, he has confined himself to describing certain episodes and bringing up certain points that are especially characteristic both of French prisoners during this war and of the Germans in the period between 1940 and 1942.

The author has refrained from giving the name and location of the camp or from truthfully naming the "Kommandos" and German officers with which he came in contact. He has even gone to the point of inserting false clues to the camp's locality, such as imaginary landmarks, so as to mislead readers whose interest may be too specialized. But, if he was thus forced to sacrifice a certain amount of clarity and precision to the safety of his comrades, he has at all times been careful to adhere as closely to the truth as possible in describing atmosphere, characters, and events. The truth is eloquent enough to speak for itself without any embroidery on his part.

Although this book may serve a purpose, it was certainly not written to defend a thesis. The evolution in morale undergone by the French prisoners of war has been described without any attempt at concealment, not only for the sake of

the truth but also because the author, a former prisoner who with millions of others like him passed through all the stages of a defeatist complex, believes that it was far more to the credit of these men that they reached a state of aggressiveness after experiencing a long period of intense hardships than if they had all been heroes in the beginning. For that matter, if they had been heroes in the beginning, they would not be where they are today. As far as regards the Germans, this book bears witness that, contrary to the propaganda which asserts that the only good German is a dead one, the French prisoners knew both good ones and bad ones. Harsh experience may have taught them that so long as the present regime continues to function, whatever the character and opinion of the individual Germans may be, taken collectively they will be unable to influence the course of events ; none the less, the prisoners have also learned to distinguish between the Nazis and the non-Nazis, between those who are their bitter enemies, those who are neutral, and those who one day will help them. In every camp, each prisoner knows already which of the prison guards will be shot on the day of victory ; but he also knows that another will be placed behind the barbed wire he guards today, while a third will simply be furnished with civilian clothes and sent back to his home.

There is a story told by the veterans of the last war who were prisoners then that on November 7, 1918, everything was as usual in the camps : strict discipline, goose step, changing of the guards, reveille and taps, club and cudgel, rifle and police dog. On the morning of November 8, 1918, without any previous indication, not a German was left in the camp, and at the gate, instead of a ferocious and aggressive sentry, stood an abandoned gun.

The Germany of today, appearances to the contrary, is even more insecure. Its final downfall will not come unexpectedly. And the men who as prisoners, on November 8, 1918, were content to disappear without a word, will this time, along with their friends, have a role to play in Germany. And they will fulfil it before the sentry gets away.

R. G.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. START OF A LONG JOURNEY	I
II. " NACH BERLIN "	8
III. THE CAMP	16
IV. THE SLAVER	23
V. THE BARRACK	30
VI. DISCUSSIONS	38
VII. WOMEN	46
VIII. PROPAGANDA	52
IX. CAMP JOBS	61
X. THE MARKET	67
XI. DISORDER IN THE NEW ORDER	74
XII. OUR HOSTS	81
XIII. KOMMANDOS	90
XIV. CAMP DOCTORS	100
XV. ESCAPE	109
XVI. DISCIPLINARY BARRACK	116
XVII. A SALUTE TO ALLIES	123
XVIII. HOMECOMING	136
XIX. BEHIND THE BARBED WIRE, ARMIES ARE RISING	152

I

Start of a Long Journey

WE HAD BEEN TOLD TO HOLD. WE HAD HELD. BUT ALL round us there was no longer any front nor any organized resistance. The German avalanche had long gone past us. The racket outside — merely mopping-up operations. For even our strongpoint, this village which we had fortified and held for days, no longer existed as such. In an hour or two we should be prisoners. Perhaps sooner. We could do nothing more about it.

Defeat? Thinking back on it, I can see that until, on that June day, in the cellar of a ruined house, we awaited our capture by the Germans, we had never dreamed of the possibility of a general defeat. We knew nothing of what was going on elsewhere. The Somme was lost. But behind that there was the Marne, the Seine, if need be, the Loire.

When we left Alsace we had merely known that "things were going badly in Belgium". Belgium was a long way off. And then . . . Well, then, first came an interminable train journey, then marches, more marches, and still more marches, across the departments of Seine-et-Oise, Oise, Somme. Deserted fields. Evacuated villages. Silent radios. No letters. No papers. Somewhere, we came upon the Germans. Our advance battalion was trapped in an ambush and lost half its strength. We dug ourselves in, we fortified the villages in hedgehog style. To the usual fatigues was added one new to us — burying the dead. There were the anticipated skirmishes and patrols but there were also unanticipated German aeroplanes. There were five-cartridge clips for rifles designed for three-cartridge clips, but that was normal because confusion is a part of war; there were no supplies, but that was war; and there was no post, but that, too, was war. And then, one day the skirmishes and surprise attacks ceased and in their place came the big German

push. It was June 4 and I know now that the newspapers at the time called it the Battle of the Somme. The Germans had tanks, Stukas, and much more besides. They also had a reconnaissance 'plane. We called it the petrol tin and at first it made us laugh because it seemed clumsy and ridiculous, but we did not laugh long, for the positions it flew over hadn't long to wait. We — well, the first day, we still had some artillery, but on June 5th, in the morning, our guns ceased fire, the 155's first because they were captured first, and at noon there were no longer even the 75's. And then, it was the Germans who began firing from the direction where our artillery had been. They fired from in front and they fired from behind, and there were the Stukas as well. At a given moment the German gunners fired in full sight and at close range. They were in their shirt-sleeves and appeared to be taking things easy. Their infantry travelled in lorries as far as what was called "the scene of operations". The German infantry had no junk slung round them and they utterly lacked that air of an overloaded mule which distinguishes the soldier in the field. They had come along like a football team, but they were never in any hurry to take a position before the arrival of their tanks.

We fell back from position to position, in ever-dwindling force, and finally found ourselves in this "hedgehog village".

There were barricades across the road and barbed wire behind the houses. That held as well as it might. And in the end, there was the cellar.

In the distance we could still hear the noise of battle. From time to time, too, there were bursts of machine-gun fire pretty close to us, from men who had barricaded themselves in a house.

What exactly took place in our cellar? I no longer know. We waited. We thought vague thoughts. No one spoke. There still remained in me, I remember now, the childish hope of being relieved, in the middle of a region held for days by the Germans. But it was only a hope right at the

back of my consciousness, a sort of day-dream. . . .

I have a blurred memory of a cramped place with sweating walls, the floor space crowded with indefinable objects rendered mysterious by the gloom. Wounded men groaning from time to time . . . empty boxes . . . bits of kit. In one of the walls, just below the ceiling, was a barred window, a slit letting in a little daylight, just enough so that the cellar was not absolutely dark. But as for recognizing definite objects . . . How many were we, and who were all those men? I shall never know. When I got there, I had found the place crowded; normally it served as headquarters for the captain of our company. There were men there, but there were officers as well. There was a lieutenant, seriously wounded, who had been unconscious for hours. With a handful of men he had held the trench which guarded the village from frontal attack. The two men who had brought him in were the sole survivors. There was also a captain, a fat old chap who had fought in the other war. It was he who had commanded the regiment's anti-tank guns. He had been found unconscious but only slightly wounded, not far from the spot where a bomb had destroyed his last gun. To restore his nerve they had given him rum, lots of rum. He was drunk. He was the only one among us who talked, continuously, confusedly, bidding us keep on fighting, explaining to our captain, who was also in the cellar, what must be done to render the place impregnable or to blow it up if necessary.

The other captain didn't listen. Seated on a box, leaning back against the wall, he seemed deaf and insensible. His face, ravaged by insomnia, surmounted by hair cut *en brosse*, barred by a bushy, drooping moustache, was strangely calm; the twilight of the room emphasized his immobility. Had it not been for the whip he held in his hand, a heavy riding-whip with a silver handle which, for hours, tapped in a regular rhythm on his leather leggings, one might have thought him dead. He, too, was an officer of 1914-18. A thick-set body on the bowed legs of an old cavalryman, brusque manners, and a harsh but not unkindly way of

speaking — he was the true company patriarch who knows that his men only ask to have confidence in someone. Looking at him now, it suddenly came back to me how taciturn he had been latterly, often seized with inexplicable accesses of rage which he vented on anyone about anything. Had he foreseen what was going to happen? Had he himself had no faith in the reassuring words which he lavished on us? Only yesterday, the day before, even this morning, it was he who had held us up. When, three days ago, he was asked whether it was true that we were cut off, he replied in his usual surly, sullen way: "Well, what of it? We shall be relieved." I suddenly realized that it was to those words that, even in this cellar, even when the Germans had long gone past us, I continued to pin my faith.

It got darker and darker in the cellar. Little by little, the sounds which came from outside grew less violent. Only a few hours before, it had been the dull explosions of mines, mortars, and cannon which had predominated, interspersed from time to time by those of bombs. These explosions first grew less frequent, then died down, their silence making audible the intermittent tac-tac of machine-guns and rifle-fire. With these was mingled now, more and more frequently, the roar of grenades. We pictured them hurled into cellars like our own.

The atmosphere became more strained. Should we get out before "they" came? Should we go to meet them? Or should we risk being forced out with grenades? No one dared ask the question. Everyone looked at the old captain. It was he who would decide. . . . He had tautened now, and was sitting bolt upright on his box, his head thrust a little forward as though he were listening intently. His whip had ceased to flick his leggings, his features were drawn. But he still seemed not to see us.

The noise of grenades drew nearer. Outside, not far from us, were voices, rendered confused and blurred by the cellar walls. They were not French voices. The noise of tank-treads, louder and louder, became definite as it approached, communicating to the road outside, to our

cellar, to the walls, to the floor where the wounded lay, the vibrations of a delirium of scrap-iron — a column of tanks, hastening through the conquered village. And when its drone was lost in the distance, bursts of rough voices drew near. We made out commands punctuated by the explosion of grenades going off quite close. In an adjacent house, a machine-gun which we had never heard until then began firing, only to cease abruptly after some seconds in the middle of an explosion that shook our cellar.

"Come on, boys. It's time now." The captain got up heavily. He put down his whip, slowly, carefully, put on his tin hat. He hesitated, as though there were something he wanted to say, then his shoulders went back in a helpless gesture and he turned to the stairs. Then, over his shoulder, he said: "Don't move from here. Nothing will happen to you. Pack up what you'll need. I'll fix everything. I'll come back for you . . . if they'll let me. . . ."

We saw him disappear up the stairs, heard him mounting with a heavy step.

It was only then that we realized that the ground had crumbled under our feet.

The day was dying but, after the hours spent in darkness, it was dazzling. I don't know whether I was able to discern the features of the two German soldiers who supervised our exit. I have no recollection of them. I know that one of them held a machine-gun, his finger on the trigger, and that the machine-gun shook. They were both drunk and shouting raucously. "Raus," they cried, and something else that none of us understood.

The village had been razed utterly in the "other" war. A few days of fighting had been enough to recreate what it must have been like at the end of 1918. But already there were great signposts everywhere with notices in gothic characters. An acrid smoke filled the air; the few houses which still stood were burning.

The road was pitted with craters and littered with debris, but it was not that which made it look so strange: it was

covered with French soldiers. Not dead men only, as we thought at first. The dead could be distinguished from the living by their limpness, lying on their backs or curled up in unmilitary attitudes. But the others were drawn up in fives, very carefully, lying flat on their stomachs with arms stretched out before them.

A gang of Germans were there to search us. They took away haversacks, caps, and belts.

"Down," said a non-commissioned officer, pointing with his revolver to the roadway, "by fives," he added, holding up his five fingers. Some German soldiers encouraged us with kicks — the order was quickly executed.

It was unwise to lift one's head or move an arm. At intervals of about ten yards along the road stood sentinels to guard us. From time to time one of them would shoot over the heads of the prisoners — there's nothing like it for getting discipline.

Behind us we heard shouting. "Raus," cried the Germans. Other Frenchmen lay down behind us.

And while some monotonously shouted "Raus," others rummaged in the regimental lorries. It was, above all, the provision lorries that pleased them. The contents of one of these had been spilled on to the roadway. There were tins of food, bread, bags of this and that, and a huge gruyère cheese, the size of a wheel, from which each German who passed cut a slice with his bayonet. But it was the chocolate which was the big success. The soldiers who found it distributed it generously among their comrades. The guard nearest us had his pockets full to bursting. His sub-machine-gun under his right arm, the man held in his left hand a huge block of chocolate at which he gnawed from time to time. The expression on his face was divided between the martial sentiments of a conqueror intent on intimidating a contemptible beaten foe, and the delights enjoyed by his palate in contact with an unexpected prize.

There was a sudden upheaval, far ahead of us, at the entrance to the village. We made out a voice delivering a sort of speech in French. The voice drew gradually closer,

obviously making the same speech at points nearer and nearer to us.

The voice was that of a gentleman dressed as a major of the French Army. The gentleman was spick and span and very elegant. He had a monocle screwed in his right eye, wore gloves, and seemed very much at ease at the head of a train of German officers who seemed to constitute his suite.

"Listen carefully to what I say," he began. "From now on, you only obey the German military authorities. You will be taken to the rear. The German military authority expects strict discipline from you. It is absolutely forbidden to leave the ranks on the march. The escorting troops have orders to fire without warning on anyone who lags behind. Get up, fall in by fives, wait for orders!"

An officer of the S.S. went by, accompanied by an interpreter.

"You wanted to go to Berlin," he told us. "Well, you're going, but it'll be a bit different from what you imagined."

"Fall in by fives; forward march."

It was the start of a long journey.

II

"Nach Berlin"

"NACH BERLIN," SAID THE S.S. MEN. THEY WERE VERY proud of their witticism and kept repeating it.

On leaving the village, there was a barrier. Yet another search. To make it simpler, we were relieved of greatcoats and tunics. Then came marching at the double. Nothing could have been simpler. The S.S. men were on bicycles and a bicycle is made for fast travelling. We had to go forward at the same rate as our escort. Along the road stood other members of this chosen band, sub-machine-guns at the ready, cheering us on with shouts and occasional bursts of lead.

Today I still cannot recall all the details of that progress. No episode of the preceding weeks nor of all those which were to come ever touched its nightmare quality. I can still see us running, worn out after days and days of fighting, weeks of watching and sleeplessness, and I know that we were haunted by one obsession: to keep in line, not to break the formation of "fives", not to fall down, not to give "them" a pretext to fire. To left and right, in front and behind, men tottered, fell. Shots cracked. The battle was over, but the death-roll was not complete.

I do not know how long this ghastly run lasted. I have no idea how far it took us. It ended not because we could go no further, but because, at a fixed point behind the lines, the rule of the S.S. troops ended.

They drove us, a wretched herd, into a cattle pasture. But before handing us over, they meant to take a worthy farewell of us.

They made us line up in five ranks. They counted us. With the remains of formations from other sectors which were already there when we arrived, we were about five thousand. A senior officer, with a whole cohort of fellow

high-ups, reviewed us. Other conquerors photographed us. They have a mania for snapshots; already, on the way there, I don't know how many soldiers had turned their cameras on our column — they all have cameras; it must be the German tourist tradition flourishing on French soil.

The senior officer with his suite, having completed his inspection, stood a little way off from us. He gave orders to one of his juniors, who must have been an interpreter, for it was in French that he suddenly cried: "Jews, five steps forward, march!"

There was an interminable second's hesitation. The whole column seemed frozen with horror. Would anyone brave this fate? Yes. One man left the ranks, others followed, ten at first, then twenty, fifty. Finally, there were about a hundred, standing five paces off from their fellows.

The senior officer came up to them, strolled along the line. He took one by the hair, the smallest, the weakest, the most "Jewy". He dragged him a certain distance away from the rest, so that everyone could see, pushed him forward and made a little speech. The interpreter translated. And the officer, treating his victim as though he were a stuffed animal, pointed out to us his "bestial face", his "vulture nose", all the traits of an inferior and abject race.

The officer was a big man, tall and very stout. He was the perfect gentle knight. He was Siegfried slaying the dragon. And he put heart and soul into his mission.

"You see before you," he cried, "what has brought you to your present pass. This is what drove you into war. We are here to free you from him and his like. Victorious Germany will pardon you who went to war despite yourselves. But she will exterminate him" (as he spoke, Siegfried administered a kick to the dragon before him) "and them" (his gloved finger pointed to the others) "and all those of that foul race."

Victorious Siegfried finished his demonstration with a last kick at his victim. The beaten dragon, like a sleep-walker, fell back into line. The S.S. men went off with

martial gait. Other Germans took over.

The march started again. It was night now. Kilometres and kilometres, but the pace was slower. Our present escort was composed of older men. We had no hopes, for we had seen enough to be prepared for the worst ; so it was with grateful surprise that we observed that, though discipline was rigorous, it was administered without excessive zeal and without our captors, at least most of them, trying to improve on it by individual efforts. We were allowed to send parties in search of water. The walking wounded were attended to and put in lorries.

Péronne. In the town, the houses are still disintegrating within while their façades seem strangely intact. The streets are already cleared of rubble but absolutely deserted. Several kilometres out of the town another pasture where we are parked for the night. It is dark. Nothing to eat, no blankets. The men, whom the preliminary search has despoiled of everything, including their overcoats and tunics, wearily throw themselves on the cold, damp ground. Across the tangle of barbed wire a group of prisoners are chatting with a German standing guard outside with fixed bayonet. The German is holding forth, and what he says is so unexpected that we are astonished. He tells us that he is happy to be a soldier because military life is more comfortable and safer than civilian. He is a man in his forties and talks with a Berlin accent.

“ As a steel worker I had to work sixty hours a week, and my wages, no matter how long I worked, kept getting smaller and smaller. As a soldier I have nothing to worry about ; I’m eating better than I have in years, and my family gets an allowance. And then there’s no labour front, no employer, no annoyances of any sort. . . .” He goes on to extol the advantages of being a prisoner : “ The war is over for you. No one knows how it’s going to turn out for us.”

The next morning we start out early. There is still nothing to eat. On the road we form an endless column stretching for miles and miles and continually being swollen

by fresh arrivals. Compared with the number of prisoners, the escort troops are negligible. But truckloads of soldiers are constantly speeding by the convoy, and every village is swarming with Germans. Nevertheless, escape would be possible were it not for the fact that we are so exhausted and weak that the thought does not even occur to us. Like a herd of cattle, we trudge on, ten, twenty, thirty, thirty-five kilometres. From time to time, in spite of the danger of being shot, men drop to the road unable to drag on another step. Here and there shots ring out; nearly always they are fired into the air. The escort does not show much enthusiasm. They are men well on in years, individually not harsh, severe only when they see an officer approaching. Once the officer has gone on, the storm quickly passes. Some of them even apologize afterward: "We have to obey orders."

And thus we go on for days and days. Sometimes in the evenings we are given a watered soup which has the tremendous advantage of being hot. Once we are even given a piece of bread. Many of us have lost all dignity and beg for something to eat from the Germans watching us go by.

Our escort changes at each stage in the journey. But they are always men belonging to the second reserve, vastly different in mentality and actions from the youngsters we had seen on the first day. In spite of the short time they have in which to get acquainted with us, they talk readily, while some of them, so long as they are not observed by others, speak frankly and sincerely. The effect produced by official propaganda can be traced in varying degrees, and it is clearly evident that the general order of the day is to pacify the French and condemn the English. Nevertheless, we often sense almost a feeling of envy underneath their cautious words for "a country in which everyone can live quietly and peacefully", and even regret at seeing one more democracy destroyed.

At last one day we arrived at a station. Waiting for us was a train made up of fifty cars, most of them German and therefore slightly larger than the French "forty men

eight horses". Five thousand men were to be carried in these. I don't know how we managed to squeeze into our car, but I remember that the rifle-butts of our guards had a lot to do with it. For two days we rode in that car, 106 of us piled up on top of each other. The doors were shut and padlocked, and it was impossible to get near one of the barred windows. There was absolutely no way of telling what zigzag course the train followed, bringing us finally to Givet in the Ardennes where we were to leave the train. On the way we were given a little bread and a piece of cheese. In spite of this, however, we had reached the end of our tether, and the Germans had to resort to their guns again to make us march the fifteen kilometres to the transient camp at Beauraing, our next stopping place. Upon our arrival there were many who failed to answer the roll-call. Had they been shot? Or had they been picked up by ambulances? To this day no trace of them has been found.

We spent three weeks at Beauraing, the scene of one of the most humiliating incidents that happened during these demoralizing weeks. Standing in the station were several car-loads of shells. The German asked for a detail of volunteers to transfer the shells into trucks, holding out a promise of cheese and bread for those who would do the work. There was a wild rush. Several hundred prisoners fought for the job, men of every branch of the Army, of every rank. The Germans were obliged to send over two hundred back to the ranks.

The complete demoralization of a whole army is an amazing and frightful thing. It was to be temporary, but for weeks and even months it seemed to deprive some of us of our entire personality, our dignity as men, our whole background. I shall always remember an Alsatian quartermaster-sergeant whose father and two elder brothers had given their lives for France in 1914 and who, during the present campaign, had been one of the fiercest non-coms. in my company. He had fought the Germans with a kind of personal hatred. I saw this man talking to some German soldiers and outdoing them in their own Nazi doctrines. He was denouncing

democracy and making anti-Semitic speeches with such vehemence that the Germans themselves were showing a certain amount of reserve. It should be underlined that these were merely German privates watching us go by from the ground floor of the houses where they were quartered, and that the circumstances were such as to exclude any possibility of the sergeant's profiting by his attitude. There must have been a basis for this man's behaviour — resentment at having fought in vain, disgust for all the numerous obscure factors which were the cause of our disaster, and perhaps a feeling of despair — which led him and a great many others, seeing and, what is worse, feeling themselves beaten, to confide in a country, a regime, and a doctrine that had proved to be stronger.

Such incidents made our terrible journey far more painful. Although the majority of prisoners condemned the attitude of their "collaborationist" comrades, there were few who dared publicly express their disapproval. Yet it was not long before a number of incidents occurred which brought us hope and confidence. At Luxembourg it was the attitude of the population, who ignored strict orders not to go near the train in order to bring us bread and refreshments, and to encourage us, saying that we must not be disheartened because "the Germans, in spite of everything, will never win".

Later on it was the gallant attitude of some English prisoners of war at Trier, who, despite the opposition of their escort, marched through that first German town, column by threes, whistling "Tipperary" and keeping perfect step. It was almost a victory march, a march by men who were sure of themselves and of their cause, and not the least bit affected by their status as prisoners. They marched down the street, heads held high, looking neither to right nor left, and bearing their dirt and rags magnificently, not like tramps but like soldiers returning from the battlefield.

And last, during a stop by the train that was taking us from Trier toward south-west Germany, it was our first

encounter with Polish soldiers, a detail sent over to feed us, that also showed us it was possible to be prisoners without being conquered and that we could submit to the Germans without being dominated by them. They also showed us that, although beaten, France would always remain a source of hope for the other nations of Europe. The confidence which they placed in our country, the friendliness which they showed, gave us back some of our self-confidence ; and, when the train departed, we were in somewhat better spirits and feeling less humiliated.

That was the last night of our journey. We finally fell asleep after once more painfully struggling to create 106 "berths" in a box car.

"Wake up ! Everybody out !" The men open their eyes slowly, as though coming out of an anæsthetic ; it takes quite a while for them to realize where they are. In the opaque blackness of the box car, 106 men seek painfully to disentangle themselves from the mass of arms, legs, and bodies.

Suddenly the doors, which have remained closed for so long, are thrown open with a great clatter. A dazzling light bathes the interior of the car, throwing into sharp relief the silhouettes of the guards waiting outside. Helmeted and booted, they stand with fixed bayonets, a live wall stretching out of sight along the platform.

"Raus !" A raucous tone, and a word with which we have become all too familiar during the journey. "Column by fives !" German officers walk down the column. We are counted. Then recounted. "Forward march !" The line of German soldiers faces right and moves with us, squeezing in on us. As we march out of the rural station, they are joined by other soldiers looming out of the darkness with furiously barking dogs held on leashes.

Dogs. Bayonets. A road that never ends. A heavy rain pours steadily down. The ground is soaked and turns into bottomless mud under our feet. At last a huge gate before us. Barbed wire entanglements. More searchlights. A

wooden observation post. "Halt!" A carved signboard, brilliantly lit up. It was placed there and illuminated for our benefit. It shows, in almost life-size figures, their outlines deeply marked in the wood, a file of French, English, and Polish soldiers, disarmed and in rags, stooping beneath an invisible burden. And a caption in gothic letters carved into the wood reads: Nach Berlin.

We look at each other. And for the first time we become fully conscious of our situation. After two weeks of nightmarish marches and train trips, of nocturnal halts in cow pastures, of degradation and semi-consciousness, this signboard gives us an ironic and significant picture of our situation, its tragic outlines heightened by the harsh brilliance of the searchlights. We are prisoners, more than prisoners — symbols of defeat.

III

The Camp

“COME AND GET IT!”

Not much to get. But there was bread. A fortune in bread. Two hundred grams. This quantity was to last for the whole day. But it seemed enormous to us.

The bread came to us as a gluey substance that dried out in less than five minutes. Nevertheless, during the first two or three months of captivity, until the first packages from France arrived, the distribution of this bread was to become the most eagerly awaited moment of the entire day. At night we would go to sleep thinking of the next day's ration of bread, and in the morning it was our first thought upon waking.

“Assembly!” The 408 occupants of the barrack, lined up on the waste ground behind the building, encountered for the first time their new master, the Herr Gefreiter Hinterhuber. This Bavarian corporal, a choleric little man firmly persuaded of his own importance, after having carefully counted and recounted us, made a lengthy oration on the regime and discipline of the camp. It was *verboten* to leave the barrack between eight and twelve o'clock and between one-thirty and six o'clock. It was also *verboten* to go to bed except between nine in the evening and six in the morning. *Verboten — verboten — verboten.*

“You are in a prison camp and not in a hospital. If the regime does not appeal to you, it's too late to complain. You should have thought about it before you declared war on Germany. Dismiss!”

Here, then, is the barrack that will be our home for years and years. It is 180 feet long by 30 wide. It must serve as shelter and *lebensraum* for 408 men, crammed into two halls separated from each other by the washroom. From top to bottom and from end to end it is completely filled with a

curious maze of scaffoldings : three platforms, one on top of each other. Each of these platforms is a bed for four men ; each scaffolding holds twelve. Four tables and eight benches complete the furniture. Putting things in the best possible light, therefore, during the day there are seats for sixty-four men. Not another stick of furniture, no drawers, no shelves ; the few personal things that remained to us, together with our clothes at night, had to be stowed away in the beds.

216 men are crowded into Barrack A, the larger of the two halls ; Barrack B holds 192. Each of the halls is commanded by a French non-commissioned officer, usually a company or regimental sergeant-major. Under his orders are other officers, each in charge of twenty-four men ; an interpreter, also prisoner, acts as his intermediary in all contacts with the German officer in charge of the barrack or with other authorities. From where did these barrack commanders, these interpreters, all this personnel, spring ? Often they were simply the greatest opportunists, the men who had obtained the soft jobs, the loudest mouthed, who had seen a chance to live on good terms with the new masters, to be exempt from work parties and from the majority of the inconveniences attached to our position. But also in a number of cases, particularly the lower ranks, such as the group commanders, they were men who had been put there in good faith by their comrades, and it must be admitted that often their job was neither easy nor enviable. For their principal task, especially during the first months, consisted in the distribution of soup at a time when hunger had wiped out whatever had been left of the men's solidarity and group spirit and when bloody battles were fought over potato peelings.

Life went on grimly and monotonously. Reveille at six o'clock. Two hundred grams of bread as daily ration, and an indefinable beverage masquerading under the name of coffee. In the lavatory, four hundred men battled around a single spigot for the privilege of washing without soap and cleaning their teeth without brush or paste. Assembly at seven o'clock. Until seven-thirty, waiting for the Herr

Gefreiter to come to count and recount us. After this, back to the barrack until eleven o'clock — soup time. Indescribable hubbub around a pail of liquid made of fish powder or soya. Permission to walk about the camp until one-thirty. After that, the barrack again until evening soup. Another *mêlée*, and at nine o'clock lights out.

These were terrifying weeks. Hunger plagued us from dawn to dusk, and would often prevent us from sleeping at night. We spent our days in the cramped quarters of our barrack, where we were forbidden to lie down and where no more than sixty men out of six hundred could find seats, for there were far more prisoners in the barrack than had been expected.

We lacked even the most elementary conveniences, but the worst thing about the whole ordeal was the demoralization of all these men. Two subjects dominated every discussion or conversation: food and freedom. And in spite of our gnawing hunger, it was the question of repatriation about which every thought revolved.

Liberation? Of course. Let France only capitulate, we were told, and everyone will be released. Look at the Belgians. Their country gave up, and none of their men were kept. (A few days later a hundred of them were to arrive in the camp.)

Defeated without yet realizing why, and believing everything lost, many prisoners asserted that absolute submission was necessary. It was the repetition in camp of the fatal *sauve qui peut*, that had led to the collapse of so many sectors on the front. So there was nothing to be astonished about when the news of the signing of the armistice was in general hailed with joy.

But the armistice terms did not provide for the repatriation of prisoners until "after the peace". After the peace with England, naturally. And, if the French prisoners were not yet back in their homes, they could blame the stubborn English, who continued to fight a futile war.

This argument soon threw a chill on even the most outspoken advocates of capitulation. But the Germans quickly brought up another point. Perhaps Hitler would now wink

at the terms of the armistice. If France's conduct should be deserving, perhaps as a favour he would agree to liberate the prisoners according to their race.

Their race? Certainly. Didn't we know that the term "French nation" was a pure myth; that there was no such thing as a French people but merely a completely arbitrary agglomeration of varied and diverse peoples whose greatest desire was to be freed from the ancient yoke of a tyrannical central power? There were Bretons, Flemings, Normans, Catalans, Basques, and so forth, not to mention Alsatians and Lorrainers, who were Germans pure and simple, or Corsicans and the inhabitants of the Maritime Alps and Savoy, who were Italians. Therefore the Third Reich's generous gift of freedom would be measured, even before the total victory over England, by the creation of these new national states liberated from the French yoke and the return of the various races, together with the regions they inhabited, to the countries to which they belonged by right.

One day all the Bretons were gathered together, and five hundred of them were led off to an unknown destination. Later on we learned that they had not been taken away for repatriation but instead had been sent to a special camp in Saxony where German experts on the "Breton Question" were waiting to teach them Breton and give them the political training necessary before they could be repatriated. Only a very few were allowed to go home, and then not until they had agreed to join the "Autonomous Breton Party", for which the solicitous Germans had given them membership cards.

Apart from this, a whole series of departures had begun, but not for France. There was a heavy exodus of work battalions, sent either voluntarily or by force to the *Arbeitskommando*. These expeditions started at the beginning of July, and before long were going at such a rate that the camp would soon have been left empty had it not been for constantly arriving fresh batches of French prisoners.

All this movement did not appear to presage a forth-

coming liberation. The prisoners still in camp were astonished witnesses of the continuous procession of tens of thousands of their comrades. They must have been the first among the tremendous masses of French prisoners to regain their balance and see things as they really were. For, although tightly enclosed behind triple barriers of barbed wire, guarded by an entire regiment surrounding the camp in a ceaseless watch, and closely watched on the inside by trained police dogs, they nevertheless had an observation post that enabled them to see certain things that escaped and that continue to escape the attention of many people living in the "freedom" of the new European order.

They had no newspapers to tell them what was happening in the outside world. But, even if they had, newspapers would have been poor substitutes for the numerous sources which every day brought them uncensored news.

First of all, each of them had his own administrative number plate. At the beginning of July, the Kommandantur had just handed out plate number 30,000. Toward August 15, the latest arrivals were given plates numbered from 65,000 up. In September, the 80,000 mark was passed. And the Germans continued to deliver more of them until February 1941, when the new prisoners were registered in the series ending with 125,000.

The men in camp remembered having read in the armistice terms that the troops not taken prisoner by June 23, 1940, would merely be disarmed and sent into the non-Occupied zone for demobilization. And so they wondered at seeing these tens upon tens of thousands of their comrades arriving in camp, the hundreds of thousands who kept arriving in the other German camps. Where did they come from?

It was not very difficult to find the answer. It was found, in the barracks where men by the hundreds lay on the floor, the benches, and the tables, or in the infirmary, where were packed the hundreds of sick and slightly wounded. There were thousands of the new arrivals who had been made prisoners long after the armistice. Among them were men

officially demobilized in the un-Occupied zone and then arrested, often by the French police or gendarmerie, upon returning to their homes in the Occupied zone. There were those who had been taken prisoner months after having returned to civilian life, and there were others who had never been soldiers. One day in November, a priest clad in his cassock arrived in the midst of a convoy of prisoners ; the Germans in camp compelled him to put on a uniform so that he would bear more resemblance to a prisoner.

The men coming from France proved an inexhaustible well of information for those already in the camp. They had listened to the British broadcasts ; they had witnessed the bombardment of German military objectives by the R.A.F. ; they never ceased talking about the revival of a spirit of resistance in France. And they told the most extraordinary tales about the looting of the country by the Germans. Their stories cleared up certain prudent allusions contained in the letters we received from our families. And those prisoners who from time to time were sent to the railway stations on work details confirmed these accounts by describing the innumerable freight trains returning from the west, laden with staggering quantities of war booty : clothes, furniture, foodstuffs of every description.

In particular, the new arrivals gave us a graphic outline of the famous " collaboration " that the Germans were making such a fuss about. The account of men handed over to the Germans by the French police drew a particularly painful picture for us, and the stories of men who had been jointly guarded on their way through France by S.S. troops and the Garde Mobile made a deep impression on all of us.

Carried away on the crest of this unending torrent of news, our morale underwent a transformation. In the barracks during the long hours of day and night when the men were shut in, on the path that traversed the camp from one end to the other, and on the waste ground between the barracks and the barbed wire, conversations gradually switched over to different topics and a different orientation. There was less and less talk about liberation and more and more about

the reasons for our defeat and the possibilities of a moral, political, and military renaissance.

"There's no use waiting for the Germans to free us," said someone in the course of one of those hectic and interminable discussions that were going on at this period. "We shall not be free until the day we see the Allied troops appear at the gate of the camp." That was the general feeling from the Autumn of 1940.

IV

The Slaver

WE CALLED HIM " LE NÉGRIER " (THE SLAVER). HE WAS A prisoner like the rest of us, but he had a great deal of power. Quite stout and of middling height, he had a baby face with fat pink cheeks. It was easy to imagine him wheeling a perambulator through the streets of his little garrison town, with his fourth child, born just before the declaration of war. But I wouldn't know whether his friends in that town could have imagined him fulfilling the role in the prison camp which had earned him his nickname.

For this French regimental sergeant-major was the official purveyor of cheap labour to the Germans. I have no desire to pass judgment on him ; that is a task for a French military court after the war. If I speak of him, it is because he and his colleagues in the other camps played such an important part in camp life that it would be impossible to speak of the prisoners without mentioning him.

He appeared for the first time at the beginning of July. He burst into the barrack one day, accompanied by two other French regimental sergeant-majors and a German sergeant, ordered an immediate general assembly, and, pulling a notebook out of his pocket, demanded fifty volunteer farm workers for " a job in the country ".

The first time, he had no trouble at all in getting the number he wanted. Hoping to be well fed, happy to get out of camp and work at their trade, the men leaped at the chance.

The same thing happened on his second appearance. But when the slave-trader turned up for the third time to ask for a hundred volunteers, only six men stepped forward. The news had spread from men who had returned sick that the " job in the country " consisted of constructing a dam, that for ten hours a day the men had to toil up to their waist

in a river, that they got no better food than at the camp, and that while they were not working they were locked up in a barrack without ever being allowed to go out.

"No volunteers? Very well, I shall pick the men myself." But that did not prove so easy. Some claimed they were sick and others based their refusal to go on their rank as non-commissioned officers. But the slave-trader ended up by getting his hundred men; the next day he came back with ten German soldiers to take them to their work.

The sergeant-major very quickly earned himself a foul reputation. In a prison camp news spreads like wildfire. No sooner did he step into one of the barracks with his two aides than the neighbouring barracks were miraculously warned and the men concealed themselves as he made his rounds.

But one is not a sergeant-major for nothing. There are ways and means. The barrack commanders were threatened by the Kommandantur and made responsible for the volunteering of their men. They were obliged to draw up and keep open for inspection lists of their effectives, marked with the rank and peace-time occupation of each prisoner. In spite of all these controls, many men might have escaped from the Germans. But they could not escape from the slaver.

"So you don't want to go on Kommando? You say you're medical? What unit? Ha! Stretcher-bearer in an infantry regiment. You didn't belong to a medical section but you were a private. You have no right to belong to the medical personnel. Kommando."

"Sick? You say the major vouched for you? When? Barrack commander, let me have the list. Let's see now. . . . Ah, here! Rheumatism. You reported sick on purpose. You're no more sick than I am. Fit for Kommando. You can leave tomorrow."

"You're a non-com.? That's what you say. Your stripes? Anybody can wear them. Show me your Army papers. You don't have any? Well, that's just too bad for you. Come on, let's see your sleeve. You say you're a

sergeant? Is that so! Now you listen to me. I tell you that you were nothing but a corporal. I can still see the marks of the woollen stripes you unpicked. Fit for Kommando. Out you go. And consider yourself lucky I don't report you."

The slaver could even find "volunteers" among those he was unable to take by force. I have seen him harangue a group of recently arrived non-coms. not yet up in the tricks of the prisoners' trade.

"You're non-commissioned officers. At present you cannot be compelled to work, for the Germans respect international conventions. But one of these days France will be signing an agreement to waive all privileges for non-coms. When that happens, you'll be sent to work in the Ruhr mines. Terrible. Constantly bombed. You'd do better to volunteer now to work in the country." Out of some hundred and fifty non-coms. in that group, the slaver got eighty.

At the end of three months he had actually succeeded in eliminating every means of evading the work parties. The whole camp had been reorganized to facilitate his work. And that work was difficult. There were numerous categories of prisoners that should have been exempt from Kommando work. There were the unwilling non-coms.; there were the employees in various camp services; there were those acknowledged to be sick; there were the "Ethnic groups", in process of being "liberated", such as the Alsatians and Lorrainers, considered Germans, and the Bretons, who were being re-educated; there were the men of the medical corps; and, lastly, there were the numerous foreign volunteers held in camp for examination by the Gestapo. Naturally, the ordinary privates, liable to fatigue duty at the will of their captors, belonged to none of these categories and would often try to pass themselves off either as Lorrainers or as foreigners or as sick men, which never failed to lead to lengthy and tedious verifications.

With the object of putting a stop to these manoeuvres, the authorities reorganized the camp and placed each category of prisoners in a separate barrack. There were

barracks for non-coms., for camp employees, for Alsatians, for Bretons, for foreigners, and there were barracks for "the others". The men in the latter hadn't a chance of escaping the labour draft. The slaver ruled supreme. Thanks to his zeal, the Germans had by November managed to draft 65,000 out of 80,000 men for Kommando work. Nevertheless, the Germans were still not satisfied.

Up till November 1940 the prisoners had been used solely in agriculture and public works. But from then on the needs of the Third Reich seemed to become so pressing that, contrary to all dictates of security, prisoners were put into war industries.

The first indication the camp received of this was in a considerable widening of the functions performed by the Labour Ministry, which had its offices at the headquarters of the Kommandantur. The hunt for labour, which till then had depended entirely on the cunning and zeal of the slaver, was put on a more rational and quasi-scientific basis. There was another general inventory of all prisoners, new cards were made out, and a great many new card indexes created. One of these classified the prisoners according to barrack and enabled the Germans to control at any given moment the number of men available in each one. These cards even had up-to-the-minute reports of doctors' visits, thus preventing any attempt to claim illness under false pretences. Another index classified the men by profession or trade. Hereafter the Kommandos were organized on the basis of these card indexes. Those who were not farm workers were taken out of the fields and sent to do work that corresponded to their civilian jobs. Tens of thousands of metal workers found themselves suddenly thrown into armament factories, while miners were sent into mines, and chemists were obliged to start working for the great I.G. Farben and Badische Anilin corporations. Rational exploitation of the prisoners thus reached a maximum degree of perfection.

But even that was not enough. Millions of French, Polish, and Belgian prisoners laboured night and day in

factories and workshops, in railroads and in shipyards. Day by day the trains coming from every corner of occupied Europe drained toward the Third Reich thousands upon thousands of "voluntary civilian workers". Without halt the entire Continent, transformed into a gigantic war plant, kept pouring tanks, aeroplanes, and guns into Germany. But it was still not enough. More slaves were needed, and yet more slaves; there was no end to the number of slaves that were required.

Where was this additional man-power to be found? By December there were no more than 15,000 men left in the camp, in spite of new convoys of French war prisoners that brought the total of available workers up to 100,000. These 15,000 men were non-commissioned officers, camp employees from the various administrative departments, the workshops, kitchens, and so forth, and the sick or convalescent. How were they to wring another 5000 men from this group? A very simple solution was found. This was to make the life of the non-coms. as miserable as possible so that they would prefer Kommando work to staying in camp. Food rations were reduced. Fatigue duties were increased and made more arduous.

For, although international conventions do not permit the forcing of non-commissioned officers to do work outside the camp, they are liable to fatigue tasks in camp. And the term "fatigue" is not very closely defined. There was nothing to prevent their being made to do navvying inside the camp, nothing to stop their being compelled to dig holes one day merely for the pleasure of filling them up again the next.

At first this new regime applied only to non-coms. up to and including the rank of quartermaster-sergeant, and for three days a week. But this got no results whatever. The same group of men that during the first weeks of captivity had been so docile and meek had acquired a fierce spirit of resistance. What! Do Kommando work? Give "them" voluntary assistance? Not a chance!

Food rations diminished still further. Still no result.

"Fatigue duty" was extended from three days a week to four, and then to six. Still no result. Finally the exemption up till then accorded battalion and regimental sergeant-majors was lifted. But not one man left.

Every day now 8000 non-coms. of all ages and ranks could be seen throughout the camp, digging in the ground, working with pick and shovel, hauling wheelbarrows — sergeants, master sergeants, regimental and battalion sergeant-majors, infantrymen, artillerymen, Chasseurs, Spahis, sharpshooters, sailors, aviators, young and old, many of them wearing the Croix de Guerre, the Médaille Militaire, and numerous decorations from earlier campaigns, often from the last war. They are fighting today by refusing to do useful work for the Germans, by preferring to do far more strenuous work that is of use to no one, and by subsisting on food rations infinitely more meagre than what they would get if they were doing work useful to the Third Reich. Compelled to work, they do, but for their part they compel the Germans to assign them jobs that cannot benefit their enemies.

"There's the motorized corps," the prisoners would say upon seeing the long column of their comrades pass by, pushing hundreds of wheelbarrows before them, the sound of their wheels on the road resembling the dull rumble made by a truck convoy. But these wheelbarrows that serve no useful purpose, these shovels that dig up the ground, these picks and the hands that wield them, have become a symbol. And this work, meant to humiliate the prisoners, has instead become a humiliation for the Germans who have ordered it and supervise it, as they see it produce the reverse effect of what they had expected. No longer a coercive measure, it has become a joke. It is now a mute but eloquent demonstration before which the Germans are helpless. Work? Here you are. But it won't do you any good.

In the spring of 1941, the scarcity of labour in Germany had become so pronounced that a general order went out from all Kommando headquarters to round up all rank-and-file prisoners who until then had been employed in a number of

administrative positions in the Kommandanturs as interpreters or secretaries, or who had worked in the camps as shoe repairers, tailors, or cooks. They were replaced by non-coms., who were drafted by the Kommando and forced to work in these positions as "fatigue duty allowed by international convention". But the few hundred men that they were able to squeeze from each camp obviously solved nothing for the Germans.

There must be about six million prisoners of war in Germany today. The Germans, helped by their hireling slavers, have made and are making use of the greatest possible number. But this is not sufficient to cover their needs. They have transformed all Europe into a gigantic slave market and are rapidly emptying it. Even that is not enough. The slave-trading sergeant-major may try in vain to supply their needs. He will be no more successful than other slavers wearing many more stripes than he. There can never be enough.

4

V

The Barrack

THE UNCEASING ACTIVITY OF THE SLAVER, THE DEPARTURE OF the Alsatians, Lorrainers, and Bretons, and the constant round-ups had finally eliminated all congestion in the camp. It seemed empty to those who for weeks had been crowded in with more than 50,000 others. Yet it continued to harbour an appreciable number that was rarely, during the first year, to fall below 15,000.

Those who remained had ended up by settling down for a long stay. As early as September the German military command, ever far-sighted, had announced that, owing to the heavy load which would be carried by the German postal service during the last months of the year, the prisoners would do well to send their families word to get their Christmas parcels off before December 10, since the German Post Office had received orders to refuse all mail addressed to French prisoners between that date and January 10. More than anything else, this announcement had made it clear to the prisoners that they must abandon all hope of going home before an Allied victory.

In the barracks, existence had taken on a definite and unchanging pattern. Friendships were born, habits formed, and a life that none of the men had ever thought possible had begun to appear almost normal.

In the beginning it had been difficult to distinguish one of these barracks from the other, for all of them had the same harsh, gloomy exterior, and the same preposterous scaffolding inside with identical tables, benches, and sour smell of overcrowded men. Now each of these barracks had come to acquire a distinct personality for every one of its inmates, which made it "his" barrack, almost his home.

Nevertheless, this "home" could be measured in square

inches. A bunk 6 feet long and 20 inches wide, a kind of pigeon-hole in a scaffolding, each section of which was 2 feet high — that was the space allotted to each man. If he was lucky enough to be one of the permanent residents of the barrack, he also had priority rights on one of the sixty-four bench seats in front of one of the four tables. If not, he had to shift for himself as best he could to eat, play cards, and spend his free time; there was not a very wide choice in a tiny barrack where 407 other prisoners were constantly possessed with the same idea. The space that each man possessed in "his" barrack was not very extensive, but any attempt to dislodge him in order to give him another that was absolutely identical with his own invariably led to a struggle. The distinguished visitor from the outer world; the pompous German general, coming with his staff to throw a disgusted glance at the representatives of an inferior race whose fleas he feared; the timid delegate of some international charitable organization, fearfully making the rounds of the barracks under the watchful vigilance of the conducting officers carefully clustered about him; the chiefs of the local S.A. proudly walking their boy friends through our zoological gardens — all these dignitaries from another planet would have been sadly mistaken to have thought of either the barracks or the men as being interchangeable.

Obviously, to them one prisoner was indistinguishable from another, one barrack differed from another only in the number it bore. Yet beneath the uniform layer of a prisoner's existence certain differences had been established; an old-timer in the camp could discern them easily, and a single glance into a barrack was enough to show him quite tangible things that set it apart from every other.

There were those in which lived the employees of the various administrative departments. These were always very clean because they were practically empty during the day. In them lived men to whom the couple of marks a week they received, the clean clothes they had been given so as not to make their contacts with the Germans too painful to the

latter, and their supplementary food rations, assured an almost comfortable standing.

There were barracks for the kitchen staff, smelling of clothes soiled by fish-powder soup. There were barracks for the artisans in camp, filled with shelves, racks, and what-nots, built from stolen wood with tools that were inaccessible to the other prisoners. There were barracks for the non-coms. "unwilling to work", where during the free hours when they were not at work digging up the earth, cranky old sergeant-majors continued to play with other cranky old sergeant-majors a game of *belote* that they had started twenty years before in Africa and had continued in many a remote outpost, many a guard-house, many a campaign, until reaching this barrack where, their glory trampled in the dust, they were reduced to sharing quarters with reservists, with whom they disagreed on every possible and imaginable point except the obligation of refusing to work for the Germans.

There were barracks for Polish prisoners, where ruled an almost aggressive neatness and a spirit of voluntary discipline, carried out in defiance of the Germans and as a measure of self-respect; where the men saluted their non-commissioned officers and sang melancholy songs; and where, as in a private house, it was forbidden to wear one's cap.

There were barracks for the North African troops, among them those for the Negroes. The latter, after a period when they had been made the object of all sorts of brutalities, had reached a point where they were almost being coddled because of the particular solicitude in which they were held by the German Colonial Office. They received frequent visits from learned professors who would measure their skulls and speak to them in their own language. One day they had even been cast in a film designed to show the atrocities they had committed on the battlefield.

And there were many other barracks containing distinct categories of prisoners: the temporary barrack, in which dwelt the men returning from Kommando work; the prison

barrack, entirely surrounded with barbed wire, for the men caught trying to escape ; and lastly those, deprived even of the platform-bed structures, benches, and tables, on the floors of which slept the foreign volunteers who had enlisted in the French Army, waiting for their fate to be decided and until the Third Reich should find an adequate punishment for the crime of having voluntarily borne arms against her.

Barrack 39 held a respectable position in this complex society. It contained none of the camp aristocracy, but on the social ladder of this artificial world fashioned by barbed wire and the regulations which the latter imposes, the inmates stood far above the interchangeable and anonymous nomads making up the clientele of the temporary barracks. This was a barrack for artisans, for men who were permanently settled, had fixed hours, and led a well-regulated life.

Most of the residents of Barrack 39 had been there for a long time. They had had an opportunity to hammer nails into the heads of their bunks so as to hang up their belongings, and even to install shelves or make netting which they stuffed with all sorts of knick-knacks arduously collected. They knew each other and had even found time to start friendships. There was so little turnover among the inmates that each of the group leaders knew the name of every one of his twenty-four men and the commander of the barrack himself could call a great many men by their right names without even garbling them.

Occupied in the various workshops of the camp — as carpenters, locksmiths, and tailors — the proprietors of which had influence, the men had somewhat better food rations than the other prisoners ; and, since their work brought them two marks a week, they were almost secure from hunger. One of the principal causes of discord having thus been removed, the distribution of soup nearly always took place without any fighting or jealous manifestations. Barrack 39 contained a group that was easy to govern, calm and level-headed, giving very little worry to its leaders.

It is true that the rhythm of life in Number 39 differed to some extent from that in the other barracks and presented rather more complex administrative problems than elsewhere. The shops, snowed under with orders from outside, were kept working in two consecutive shifts, one from four in the morning to one in the afternoon and the other from one to ten o'clock at night. This led to a complicated routine in barrack life ; the morning shift had to be awakened and fed in the middle of the night, and, besides the distribution of soup at the regular hours for the men who were not working, there were additional distributions when the men returned from work. The schedule of life in this barrack was so abnormal and bore so little relation to the hours during which the German sergeant in control was on duty that the latter had abandoned all hope of understanding what it was all about, had given up the morning roll-call, at which half the barrack was always absent, and had come to depend entirely on self-administration by the prisoners. And that, too, had largely contributed to making life easier.

Moreover, Herr Unteroffizier Weberstedt was not a bad sort. In the beginning he had tried to impress the men by yelling fiercely at them during the morning roll-call and threatening them with all sorts of terrible punishments for breaking any rules. But immediately afterward he had called the barrack commander over and told him that his words and his tone had been prescribed for him by the disciplinary officer of the camp, that he wished no one any harm and asked for as little trouble as possible, on the part of both the German officers and the French prisoners, and that he was counting more on the French officers to maintain order than on the Kommandantur. Because of this no one had held a grudge against him. Furthermore, it did not take long for everyone to see that Herr Weberstedt certainly did not sin through excess of zeal. Even when he found a man lying on his bed during the day, he would never punish him, but would merely speak to the barrack commander and tell him that "if an officer should enter" he would punish everybody and that he was appealing to the prisoners them-

selves to prevent their comrades from bringing trouble down on him and on all of them.

Herr Weberstedt had military principles that were very rare in Germany; in his private conversations with the men he knew, he loved to enunciate one of the fundamental axioms of his belief, saying: "As between my own officers and the enemy, I'm more afraid of the officers." He was almost fifty, was married, and had four children whose photos he was continually showing to the prisoners. Having been wounded several times in the last war, he had then been transferred to a prison camp for French soldiers. Perhaps it was because of this earlier experience that he was so far removed from the average mentality of the German guard. Perhaps, also, it was the memory of the last war, or his peace-time status as a worker, or his past record as a Social Democrat, which he sometimes mentioned in conversations with prisoners he knew very well, or all these factors together. In any event Herr Weberstedt was not a Nazi, not even a militarist, neither hated nor scorned his charges, and did not try to make more unbearable an existence the harshness of which he seemed to a certain extent to realize.

Even during those hours when regulations compelled him to be in camp — from seven in the morning to eleven-thirty, and from one-thirty to five in the afternoon — he rarely appeared in the barrack, which he largely abandoned to the administration of the French non-coms. And this system was very agreeable to everyone concerned.

Owing to the length of time that the men had lived together, a general spirit of good fellowship had grown up that included the group leaders and even the commanding officer of the barrack. This was very infrequent and practically impossible in the other barracks, where the working personnel was constantly being changed and where the permanent residents treated the other men somewhat as the manager of a third-rate hotel treats "casual" guests of questionable reputation who might cause trouble and get hauled off by the police. In addition, the absence of turnover in Barrack 39 had resulted in the successive elimination of those group

leaders who had not been able to hit the right note and the assumption of most of the duties by officers who had been elected by their comrades as men worthy of trust and not arbitrarily appointed.

There was another significant factor that distinguished this barrack from the other. Whereas in barracks whose set-up made elections difficult, there was always a high percentage of sergeant-majors and sergeants who were professional army men, Barrack 39 did not have one career man among its ranks. The barrack commander was a tradesman, the second in command was an engineer, and among the group commanders were teachers, shop assistants, mechanics, farmers, civil servants. These civilians in uniform had elected their own kind as leaders, and discipline had not suffered thereby, for the arguments between leaders and men had become notably less frequent and less serious than before.

It was a civilian barrack, but this only made it more passionate on the subject of military questions. Consisting as it did of men from all parts of France, of every trade and profession, and from every social stratum, it was a far better reflection of what the French prisoners were talking and thinking about than were the barracks containing exclusively such and such a category of prisoner. And what they were thinking and talking about can be summed up in one word : the war.

It was an obsession. In May and June of 1940, the whole of France had undergone not only a physical shock but also — and in one sense at least as tremendous, profound, and terrifying — a nervous shock. And it was only natural that this shock profoundly affected the prisoners of war, whose very existence, each minute of the day, recalls their defeat and constantly pounds into them the thought that they will never again be free unless their country succeeds in throwing off the yoke of the victor.

As soon as the first period of bewilderment and numbness had passed, every discussion turned to this single theme : the war. The war that had been lost and the war that still

had to be won, the whys and hows of defeat, the means of recovery, the chances of winning in spite of the great odds. A conversation might start off with anything — the inferior quality of the soup, a letter from a girl, experiences while working for the Kommando — after a few preliminary sentences, it inevitably led to the battle of France, to questions of armament and strategy, to political and military causes of the defeat. This was true in 1940, it was true in 1941, and it has not changed since.

These discussions that had started in complete chaos just a few weeks after arrival at the camp, eventually reached a remarkably high level. In the beginning they had consisted of the personal experiences of each man, things seen and lived, the quite simple and humble perspective of the plain, ordinary soldier; but toward the end they had gone far beyond a simple exchange of memories of the campaign. Against a composite background of hundreds and thousands of individual narratives, an enormous conglomeration of facts to which every man contributed, was painted an extremely clear and vivid picture of past events.

At the start of the war, most Frenchmen had left their homes with the conviction that, at bottom, this war, its causes, and the fashion in which it would be conducted, were no concern of theirs. Through a sequence of harsh and extremely bitter events they had been led to believe that nothing else in the world concerned them as much as this war. Defeated, they were forced to understand that it was their own personal destiny, the destiny of each one of them, which was at stake; prisoners, they were not long in coming to the realization that they would never again have the chance to live as decent human beings so long as German fascism continued to rule.

VI

Discussions

"DID YOU SEE THE STORY ABOUT MONTOIRE IN TODAY'S *Trait d'Union*?"

"Well, I must say it gave me a turn to see old Pétain shaking Hitler's hand."

"Go on, that's all part of the game. You'll see in the end the old man'll have the hide off Adolf."

It was night. Seated in a corner of the barrack, hardly visible in the dim light cast by a solitary lamp, four men were talking.

The scaffolding of beds that took up the whole left side of the barrack extended for only a quarter of the length of the right wall from the entrance and another quarter from the exit of the hall. The empty space was occupied by tables and benches, astonishingly deserted at that hour. At the middle table, upon which the gas-lamp threw a circle of light from its mantle that cut through the surrounding darkness like the beam of a flashlight, a single man was seated. Were it not for the invisible but palpable presence of several hundred men sleeping heavily all around, one might think him alone and abandoned in a vast hall stretching out endlessly and fantastically like some mysterious dream.

The seated prisoner was the watchman that camp regulations required each barrack to maintain throughout the night. His duties were to give the alert in case of fire, to guide through the barrack the German patrol that made its rounds at irregular intervals, and especially to see that everyone was in his bunk. If the patrol should enter unexpectedly and find the men sitting only a few yards away, he would be punished with them. But he had nothing to worry about: another prisoner posted at the entrance to the barrack would give the alarm in time, and the patrol would find no one up.

The man was reading somewhat abstractedly, occasionally cocking an attentive ear to the low-pitched voices that came to him across the darkness.

The discussion was taking place in the rear of the space between the benches and where the scaffolding began, against a wall that could be felt rather than seen in the blackness. This was the favourite rendezvous for these nocturnal meetings, for it was so situated that the men were hidden from the sight of a patrol suddenly entering, and could separate unobserved. The talking of the four men continued, and at times took on a passionate note. Yet it was neither original nor in any way different from the hundreds and thousands of discussions that went on all the time in various parts of the camp.

The watchman knew the subject and all the possible arguments; he knew the men who were talking and knew what each one was going to say. Perceiving that in spite of all this he had forgotten his book for the last quarter-hour in order to listen, he was seized with astonishment at the unflagging interest roused in him by these arguments that seemed to go around in circles.

"I don't believe it," said Colzon, an artillery sergeant. In private life he had been a clerk in the General Post Office. He was about thirty-five, level-headed, and well liked in the barrack, where he was one of the most respected of the group commanders. "I don't believe it. Everything that we hear from France shows the opposite. Pure and simple abolition of the Republic, racial laws, persecution of everyone not in favour of the regime — I tell you that isn't strategy on Pétain's part. He's doing it for keeps. Maybe in the beginning he meant to fox the Germans. But he got caught at his own game. It was he and not Adolf who was fooled. The trouble is, Adolf's fooled us too, and our families, and all France."

"But what d'you want Pétain to do? Sure, playing around with the Germans is to play into their hands. But it's a question of surviving until the British win out. Without the Germans, the factories can't stay open and the

population would starve. You know that if we don't come to terms with them, at least temporarily — what do you expect ? There isn't anything we can do about it. And if we don't give them what they want, they'll take over the whole country."

Souhard who spoke was a shoemaker from Limoges, a mild, quiet little man and a good sort. In order to save him from the Kommando, the whole barrack had invented a title that afforded him temporary protection — that of post orderly.

"For God's sake let them occupy it ! " Vandamme burst out fiercely. He was a worker from Maubeuge, gloomy and taciturn by nature but given to violent emotional outbreaks. "In the north we're being occupied for the second time in twenty-five years, and yet everyone gets along somehow. D'you think that if the Hun occupied the rest of France people would starve any more than they're doing now ? You know as well as I do that right now they're doing what they want — requisitioning, looting, stealing — they're in control of everything — economics, politics, the whole set-up. Complete occupation would create a clear-cut situation ; the Pétain Government, which has been acting as a screen for them, would vanish into thin air, and everyone would have to face the facts. If the Germans were putting out the laws that are now being signed by Pétain, people would see a lot more clearly. You don't have to look far to see what's happening in Occupied territory ; the fellows who came in yesterday told you all about it. They know what the score is there, even in Bordeaux, where the people have always thought it was none of their business. So let them occupy the so-called free territory, let them occupy it ; it would do more good than harm ! It would force the colonies to take up arms again, it would free the fleet, it would cut all this suspense short."

"Maybe so, but they'll never do it. They're not that dumb." Vigne, the school teacher, was speaking. "The Government they let Laval and Co. set up is a lot more useful to them than occupation. I don't know if Pétain has

any idea how he's being used ; perhaps he even has good intentions. But the Frenchmen around him and the Germans behind them know what they're doing all right. And besides doing better for the Germans than the Germans could do for themselves, they're dividing the people so that part of them still believe Pétain is fooling the Germans and secretly pushing De Gaulle. Even here in the camp some men still don't see clearly."

" But what can we do ? The Boches have got us, we're beaten ; and, while we're waiting for the English to win, we simply have to come to some sort of temporary arrangement with the conqueror. I'm no less against the Germans than you all are, but I don't think we have any choice left." Souhard obviously felt he was being accused by Vigne, and he spoke in an almost apologetic tone.

" Beaten, beaten ! You're only beaten if you want to be beaten. We're beaten because we think of ourselves as beaten. Look at the Poles, look at the Norwegians, and even the Dutch. Just look around the camp. Have the Poles done any crawling ? Have they once from the very beginning hidden their conviction from the Germans that one day conditions would be reversed and they would get their own back ? And you've seen the news they've received from home ! They're going on with the war ; no one's helping them, but they're not giving in because they know that giving in would make them no better off and would just prolong the war. Aren't you ashamed to think that of all the conquered nations France is the only one with an apparently legal Government collaborating ? The Boches didn't find any Laval in Belgium, nor in Holland, and certainly not in Poland. And the kind they found in Norway does nothing but discredit them."

Vigne was well launched on his favourite subject. " So now tell me why we've let ourselves go under. I'm going to tell you a story I didn't understand when it happened but that makes me see things a lot clearer today. We had a lieutenant in our company, a real man, big as they come, very strict on duty but more popular with the men than any

other officer I've seen. If he thought they were right, he'd stick up for them no matter what ; he wasn't afraid of the major, who was nothing but an old bureaucrat, or of the colonel, who was a brutal old veteran of the colonial troops. The lieutenant was a reserve officer who had been a professor in a provincial town, and I think he'd once been a pacifist. But even the career officers respected him, though he was always having rows with them.

"Well, one day when we were still in Alsace — things had already started popping up north, but we didn't know anything about it because there weren't any newspapers in the sector or any electricity for a radio — one day, I saw him leaving the colonel's office. There'd been a meeting of all the officers, and now I think they'd been told the news because the lieutenant, who was always gay and cheerful, had a ghastly look on his face when I saw him come out.

"We were good enough pals, since off duty he was unaffected and natural with everyone and could be approached by any of his men. So I went up and asked him what was wrong. Here's what he told me. I'm giving it to you almost in his exact words, because I never forgot them, either in battle or here — certainly not here !

" 'What can you do with a set-up like this ! Those people in there don't understand what it's all about. They may have been heroes in '14 but now they strike me as being petrified fossils. They don't know anything, they don't understand anything, they live in a dim past that bears no relation at all to the present. *The others, our friends the enemy, are fighting for an ideal, a barbaric ideal yes, but nevertheless an ideal. These men are fighting because they're ordered to.* I found that out today, and I tell you that this war is going to be a hard one to win. As for myself, I've never been under fire so I don't feel the right to blame those who knuckled under in other sectors. I don't know how I'd react in their position. But I know, you see, I know what most of the others do not : that this war must be won if we want to survive, not only as a nation but even as human

beings. And I believe that knowing this will give me more strength than those who knuckled under before.'

"Well, a couple of weeks later, when we were in the thick of it in the Somme, I saw him go out with several men armed with hand grenades and attack a column of tanks; he destroyed three of them and came back alive. For a week he held an encircled village with a single platoon, and he'd managed to turn them into the toughest bunch of fighters I've ever seen. When their ammunition was exhausted, they fought on with practically nothing but stones. Not one of them is left. . . . If only we had had more officers like that one . . ."

"True enough," said Colzon. "They're giving out a line about treason, deficient armament, and Lord knows what else. Quite so, but something more was lacking, and that was knowledge of what was at stake in the war. I knew a fellow in the regiment, a quartermaster-sergeant, one of the best, and a fine chap; but, as soon as he opened his mouth, he made me sick. 'What is it all about?' he used to say. 'Why should we be fighting? We've got nothing to do with this war. I don't live well now, and I won't be living any better if we win it. And if we lose it — look here, I've got my plot of ground, my wife, and my children; the Germans won't be taking them away.' Well, he's dead now, and for all that he fought well. But if he were alive, he'd soon see whether his life would go on the same with the Germans in his village, what with the regulation of farm produce, the requisitioning of crops, horses, and all the stock, not to mention the other things. 'The Germans are men like ourselves,' he used to say. I don't say they're not, and there are even pleasant ones among the lot, just as there are everywhere — look at old Weberstedt; as for brutes, they've got some real ones, probably more than elsewhere. But whether they're men like us isn't the point at all; it's not a question of them as individuals, but of what they represent and of the system they're fighting for. It's a completely different world, almost another planet; just look at the kids in uniform with their daggers that they paraded

through the camp this morning. Maybe some of them are fighting against their will. Remember the railwayman at the station — you know, the one who spoke a little French — who whispered to us that it was France's fault that Hitler was still ruling Germany? Get that, he was blaming us for having lost the war! But after all, that doesn't make things any better now.

"Probably if he'd known all we know now, the sergeant wouldn't have talked the way he used to. He was all right, and not dumb, but maybe he was talking that way because he was an orphan from the last war. You know, some people carry the mark all their lives, and anything seems better to them than killing."

"As if we wanted the killing," remarked someone who had just joined the group. "That reminds me of a lecture by Doctor Finaud — you know, the little lieutenant in the infirmary — who said several days ago during one of his classes that the fall of France was — let's see, how did he put it? — an unconscious reflex action on the part of a nation which had lost so many men in '14 that, in order to survive, she had to save the rest at any cost. What with the hundreds he's seen die of tuberculosis, the thousands he must know will die of under-nourishment, and the hundreds of thousands that will go home crippled for life, he ought to know very well that——"

"The patrol!" A man dashed by, all out of breath, and concealed himself in the shadows. A dazzling light suddenly lit up the barrack, searching every corner. Preceded by a non-com. holding a storm lamp, the patrol, armed to the hilt, clumped down the barrack.

"Four hundred and eight prisoners of war present. Nothing to report," said the watchman, saluting in the prescribed manner, better than he had ever done in the French Army, and standing impeccably at attention, in a pose which, "in the regiment", would have done justice even to a general.

The thunderous steps of the German boots faded away into the distance. Beneath his circle of light the watchman

had returned to his reading. Four hundred and seven prisoners, lost in the darkness, piled twelve at a time on their platforms like corpses in a morgue, curled into every imaginable position, slept on in that heavy slumber which bears no comfort.

VII

Women

" COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE KOMMANDANTUR. PRIMO : Correspondence. You are reminded for the last time that the number of twenty-seven lines to each letter must not be exceeded. It is forbidden . . . letters to be thrown out . . . penalties. . . . The censorship bureau has special orders . . . Secundo : Salute due to German officers. The colonel in command of the camp has noticed that the prisoners are saluting German officers with obvious carelessness or even attempt to avoid saluting. For the last time he draws their attention to the ruling in force . . . penalties provided for . . . so many days in prison . . . in case of repetition . . . military court . . ." The loudspeaker blares forth the words, repeated a hundred times. How they bore us !

" Tertio : . . . Quarto : . . . Quinto : Preservation of the German race. The prisoners' attention is drawn to the fact that they are strictly forbidden to have any relations whatsoever with women of German blood. The prisoners' own interest demands that they avoid any action that might be interpreted as an infraction of the German law on this subject. Prisoners guilty of contravening these instructions are liable to a minimum prison term of five years ; in serious cases, this term will not be less than ten years."

The term " serious cases " causes general hilarity. Good God, women ! Behind barbed wire ? How many are there among us who dare even to think about them ?

It's true that some men come back from Kommando with a lot of stories — men working on farms, and even some working in factories, where, besides the prisoners, there are also women workers. Most certainly they're boasting, making it all up out of whole cloth. How many of the prisoners have had the opportunity to see a single woman

since they came here? Not those who stay in camp. Not those who work in shipyards. With a few rare exceptions, not those who slave in the factories. Those who are in the country . . . Only yesterday we read in the paper that a Polish prisoner had been beheaded for having "soiled the German race". You'd have to be crazy to take a risk like that. And what for?

Women . . . As a matter of fact, it isn't quite true that we don't ever see any. On Sundays there are always a few who, on the arms of their uniformed escorts, take walks in the forest behind our camp and stare at us as though we were strange beasts. There are some who are young, maybe even pretty — hard to say at a distance. It's queer, but we don't think of them as women. They waken no desire, bring back no memories. They are part of the landscape beyond the barbed wire — the soldiers with their Sunday caps and regulation white gloves, the watch-towers with their machine-guns, the flags with the double crosses. They, too, like the rest, must be war machines.

Women . . . When we were still soldiers, a long time ago, in a world even the memory of which is gradually fading, we used to talk about them a great deal. Not about ours. Especially not about ours. But about women in general. We talked about them boisterously, lewdly, pretending to be Don Juans with countless affairs; we let flow a stream of words behind which we painfully entrenched ourselves, a stream in which we tried to drown the ever-present memory of the one whom we especially did not talk about.

Here . . . even that is non-existent here. The subject is taboo. It is part of a far-away world, and yet so terribly close that it is within a stone's-throw of the barbed wire. Still, though talk may be avoided, it is not easy to banish thoughts.

There are so many things which revive the memory, making it an obsession, a torture. There are letters. Not for everyone. The colonials, even the whites among them, receive very few; there are foreign volunteers, mostly Spanish, or Jews whose families have been interned, who

never receive any. But the letters — twenty-seven lines on regulation paper every two weeks — are written in a detached tone that says nothing. They speak of objective, cold, external things; they are letters written by insubstantial shadows in living corpses. Even the writer's script is altered, rendered unrecognizable by the obligation to write in pencil, to cramp words on the narrow lines of the form headed "*Kriegsgefangenen-Post*". And how may a man visualize the face of the sender behind the curtain of time and distance, how distinguish the features that grow blurred, fade, and vanish?

There are parcels — more dangerous to peace of mind, more tangible, more concrete. They bring linen, recalled from a remote past, things heavy with memories. One day a man received a parcel in which he found a handkerchief sent by his wife, her own handkerchief drenched in her perfume. It was pitiful — and terrible.

There are photographs, at least for those who were able to hold on to them through the war, the lootings; and the searches. The self-protective mechanism that has grown up in every man forbids him to touch one, for it awakes the past. Perhaps it will live again; but today it is dead. And it makes you suffer. Fear it. Flee from it. Believe me, it will do you no good.

There are moments of solitude. Terribly rare, these. For where can solitude be found in the midst of 407 comrades living with you in the cramped quarters of the barrack, among tens of thousands of others shut up with you behind barbed wire? But there are wakeful hours when it is your turn to be watchman; nights without sleep while you lie awake thinking and listening to the heavy breathing all around you. And there are summer Sundays when everyone else is out getting some fresh air on the camp's main road and you stay alone in the barrack. They're hard on you, those hours.

For beyond barracks, beyond barbed wire, beyond frontiers, far away and inaccessible, there is a world where life goes on. Where it goes on despite your absence. Perhaps

even because of your absence. The world will roll on without you, the days will pass without you. You cannot prevent the one in your thoughts from having to live in that world from which you are erased, from living without you, from receiving impressions in which you have no part and in which you will never participate ; you cannot prevent her from having to struggle, from undergoing experiences that will never be yours. And will those impressions with which you have marked her life — the days, the months, the years she has lived with you — will they be stronger, deeper, lasting enough to survive ? Three months, six months, a year — this is time that is passing ; if it marks you, only your body suffers — scurvy that loosens your teeth, under-nourishment that weakens you, that affects your entire structure and dims your memory. But your feelings, your inner self, experience no change. For you, passing time is a glacier that keeps and preserves you, as ice preserves bodies in a morgue. For her . . .

Two years, three years. During the last war men were away for four, even six, years. Is this a consolation ? Or is it a promise ?

Far from you, in an unknown world that is not yours and to which you do not belong, life goes on. You are here, and you will stay here, buried alive, paralyzed, helpless to act. There are others acting in your stead ; events are taking place over which you have no control ; they leave traces that blot out those made earlier — what can you do ?

Resign yourself to being the impotent plaything of a fate that is beyond your guidance. The slaver may collar you tomorrow morning and send you to a mine ; the Gestapo may call for you tonight because of a careless word spoken this morning and carry you off into oblivion ; hunger, sickness, or cold may strike you down tomorrow, or the day after, or in a week, without your being able to defend yourself — these are fates that are near and tangible, and against which you can do nothing. How, then, can you dream of protecting someone else against a fate that is unknown and intangible, someone who lives far off, in a world beyond reach ?

Let the world roll on, you cannot change its course. Perhaps, after all, your fate will be beneficial, or at least not irrevocably harmful. Don't try to think. Thought is bad. Go to sleep.

And then . . . Are you the only one ? And is she the only one ? What about the millions and millions of soldiers, separated from their families by the width of oceans ; the countless war prisoners ; the deportees in their millions, "voluntary civilian workers", and the hostages ; the prisoners in concentration camps ; the peoples of Alsace, of Lorraine, of Poland, of the Baltic countries, and of the Balkans, of every corner of Europe, scattered to the four winds — doesn't the same problem exist for a hundred million and more people today ?

It is this very problem that will facilitate the individual's desperate need to find himself, to readapt himself to his fellow humans. In a world so completely unbalanced, the shared remembrance of former happiness will play a stronger role than it would in normal times. Go to sleep. Think no more about it. Think no more.

Women . . . the day three hundred of them arrived — the Polish women being deported ; they were kept in an isolated barrack while waiting to be transferred elsewhere. We saw them from a distance — companions in misfortune, whose plight, merely the fact that they were shut into barracks like ours, made us seethe with rage.

During their stay in camp, no one thought of them as women, at least not as creatures that may be desired. But just the same they brought to mind our own women ; the same thing might happen to them, and we could do nothing.

And still more women . . . One of them arrived in camp one day. A Frenchwoman, who, with cold logic in carrying out her mad plan, had succeeded in getting across the frontier, travelled all the way across Germany, and appeared suddenly at the camp gate to plead with the sentry to allow her to see her husband. The Colonel, informed of this unusual visitor, authorized the man to go to the fence

and speak to his wife for fifteen minutes, separated from her by a triple strand of barbed wire. The quarter-hour gone by, he saw her led away by two S.S. men.

There were others. . . . Women who slipped compasses, maps, and money into parcels, hiding them in cakes, for attempting an impossible escape. Or those who wrote : " Darling, don't try to escape. I don't want you to run the risk. I'd rather wait years if I have to." Or one who sent a letter saying : " Today is Christmas. Last night I was at the M——s'. All your friends were there with their wives. Not one of them is a prisoner. Louis had had himself discharged just in time. Jean and Pierre deserted in May, were demobilized in non-Occupied territory, and are now living peacefully at home. Paul escaped out of Germany. Only you are far away. And among all those happy couples I was a widow."

We can do nothing for them. And they can do little for us. They can hurt us. They can help, too . . . by promising to remain unchanged. But they must not say anything else. They must prevent us from thinking of them, for to think, now, is already to doubt. They must remain a certainty, the only certainty in the world, they must not become a problem — what else can they do for us ?

Five years of prison, ten years in serious cases. God ! What interest can we have in that ? Do living corpses need women, other women besides those waiting for them ?

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VIII

Propaganda

THE CAMP IN WHICH WE HAD BEEN COOPED UP WAS A LONG way from being finished when one day there appeared, at strategic points, a number of objects resembling some strange kind of lamp-post which, by the noise which they began to produce, were revealed to be loudspeakers. The highway along which these talking pillars had sprouted was not yet in existence except as symbolized by a line of stakes bordering a bottomless slough. The barracks that sheltered us were still lacking doors and windows, while plumbing at this period was confined to a motorized and odorous substitute in the form of a tanker lorry. There was no running water, no straw for the pallets, and hardly anything to eat. But there was already a radio.

This haste seemed to be largely justified by the fact that the propaganda carried on up till then by individual German officers, soldiers, and civilians was beginning to lose its effect and the morale of the men appeared to be deteriorating.

The official stories had little by little yielded to other sounds whose origin was doubtful but whose trend became clearer and clearer. The certainty of England's being invaded before August 15 faded with the approach of that date, and the Kommandantur could hardly ignore the fact that reports were beginning to circulate through the camp to the effect that invasion attempts had been repulsed with terrible losses to the Germans. These reports, in great detail, were false, but they reflected a state of mind that was particularly unwelcome, as those who spread them told with satisfaction of the numerous German corpses frightfully burned in a sea that had cleverly been covered with oil and set on fire at the invaders' approach. Stories, often imaginary, of raids on Germany by the R.A.F. were received with

enthusiasm, and one stormy night had even led to an exhibition of general hysteria on the part of a huge crowd massed behind the barbed wire, which had joyously acclaimed every stroke of lightning on the horizon, in the belief, against all evidence, that it was the reflection of bombs falling on a distant village. The Kommandantur had merely succeeded in raising the men's hopes, and at the same time arousing a latent hatred, by loosing the dogs and soldiers of the camp guard on them with the object of putting an end to this "indecent manifestation".

There were other indications, too, of an increasingly unfavourable attitude toward the Germans. One of the prisoners, the curé of a workers' suburb in Paris, had been authorized to celebrate mass every evening in an empty barrack. After the first day or two he had been obliged to hold mass outdoors because of the greatly increasing attendance. At the end of the service he would read out reports on general order in the camp that were furnished by the Germans, and, emboldened by the men's reaction, he had begun to accompany these reports with less and less cautious comments of his own. While blessing a convoy of Bretons supposedly leaving for France, he had said that he, together with all the prisoners, hoped that they would "do good work in our French Brittany". The curé was transferred to a disciplinary camp for Poles, where, we learned later, he had become the idol of his new flock, whose language he had not even known at first.

In exchange for the curé, we were treated to the radio and the voice of a gentleman whom, through habit, we continued to call "the traitor of Stuttgart" although the programme came from Cologne and it was not M. Ferdonnet who spoke to us.

I must say that this was a success. Up till then we had been obliged to depend entirely on stories in the camp for our information. But after the radio had been installed, we heard regularly, at six-thirty and at seven-thirty, German news reports broadcast in French. Listening to these became a firmly rooted practice, and every evening on the scheduled

hours the whole camp would gather around the loudspeakers, the news from which would give rise to long and animated discussions far into the night.

But the result of this mass broadcasting was altogether different from what the Germans had expected. For these programmes, meant for the people of Occupied France, could not help but make allusions to the British communiqués, if only to give them the lie. Thus these programmes informed us of things that we had not dared even to dream about. They enlightened us on the firm attitude of the British, on the constant bombardments of Germany and Occupied France, on acts of sabotage in the invaded countries. Naturally, this information was not given to us directly; but, by comparing it with the accounts of the newly-arrived prisoners, we had learned to separate the real truth from the flood of propaganda.

In other words, we had finally succeeded in finding the key to the code. It was enough for us to hear day after day the attacks against Churchill and the furious threats against this man who was "responsible for the continuation of the war", to understand that England had not the slightest intention of giving up and that she felt strong enough to have faith in ultimate victory. It was enough for us to hear the laments over the fate of the French civilian population subjected to savage bombings by the British, to learn of the damage the R.A.F. was doing to military objectives in France. And the attacks against "Frenchmen who are acting against their own interests and who should understand that they are being given a last chance to participate in the New Order", told us all we wanted to know about the spirit of people in the invaded countries.

Far from making us more docile, German radio propaganda had the effect of lifting us much more quickly than might have been expected out of the trough of depression into which our defeat had plunged us. In conjunction with various other factors, it had the effect of very quickly revealing the true purpose of our gaolers. These other factors are too

numerous to mention them all here, but the main credit goes to the Germans themselves.

German propaganda has often been admired for the staggering imagination which inspires it, for its perfect organization, for the wealth of its mediums ; and it has been credited with a tremendous part in the successes of the Third Reich. But this propaganda, at least where it has been successful, has always been careful to take advantage of the natural paths followed by public opinion, has attached itself to tendencies already present, doing all it could to accentuate them, and has made its appeal to instincts which circumstances already encouraged. It has never created a state of mind ; it has confined itself, and no propaganda of this sort can ever do anything else, to exaggerating an existing state of mind, exploiting it, depraving it.

It was not the Germans who created pacifism in certain channels of French thought. But they succeeded in blinding it to the real fact that after the advent of fascism in Germany this essentially democratic and humanitarian philosophy, by persevering in its efforts, was merely aiding its worst enemies and rendering a service to dictatorship and barbarism. Thus, by infiltrating into pacifist circles in France as well as other countries, they had done their utmost to exploit everything in civilized humanity that opposes the idea of carnage, by exaggerating the elements of fear, cowardice, and inertia in this human reflex.

But what instinct could they exaggerate and exploit among the two million prisoners that would be favourable to them ? There was only one that would induce the prisoners to co-operate, and that was the instinct for freedom. But the Germans could not satisfy that. They could not liberate these men and they cannot liberate them now, both because the prisoners constitute a pledge and a means of political pressure and because they form a reserve of man-power on which the life or death of Germany's war economy depends.

It was inevitable that between the propaganda fed to the prisoners and their real desires there had to be a gulf that could not be concealed. And the attempts to conceal it

could only make the gulf more obvious, the prisoners' animosity more violent. These attempts were of necessity forced to be artificial and ridiculous, such as the one which from the very start opened the eyes of the men most inclined to place their trust in Germany. Here is the setting.

It was during the first weeks, at the time of the great famine, when a slice of bread was untold wealth and prisoners would go to any lengths to obtain it. It was ten-thirty, four hours after the distribution of morning coffee, an hour and a half before soup. Several thousand men were squatting on the steps of the barracks facing the road, getting some air and trying not to think about their hunger. A huge, open truck drove through the gate, came down the main road very slowly, and headed for the central square. It was filled with bread, French Army bread, coming from God knows where. The vehicle was so heavily loaded that the bread rose above the sides in a mountain that no one could miss seeing. There was nothing to cover it. A huge crowd followed the truck, yelling and screaming for something to eat, a crowd that grew larger and larger as the truck proceeded.

The truck reached the central square, and was immediately surrounded by the crowd, stretching as far as the eye could reach and uttering wild cries. The astonishing part was that no Germans were in sight, that no attempt was made to disperse the prisoners — no dogs, no whips, not even any sentries shooting their guns off into the air.

Suddenly the crowd became still as the door of the truck opened and two officers stepped down from the driver's seat. They climbed up into the back on top of the load. One of them stooped down, picked up some bread, and made as if to throw it. Every man raised his hands to seize it, even the ones so far back that there was no chance of the bread's ever reaching them. But the officer did not throw the bread. His companion took out a small movie camera. The silence was so intense that the spring winding the film could be heard. The officer again made as if to throw the bread. Again the hands were raised. The camera, trained on the crowd, now appeared to be functioning properly, and the bread was

finally thrown. Mad scrambles and scuffles took place where it fell. The operator then turned his camera in other directions, where again hands were raised to catch the bread. This lasted for about five minutes, during which the officer must have thrown about ten pieces. Suddenly he stopped and asked in German whether there were any interpreters in the crowd. He made one of them climb up on the truck, gave him a piece of bread, and had him announce: "If the crowd does not immediately disperse to allow the truck to go through, I shall have it dispersed by the camp guard." The truck, making a sharp turn, set off for the gate.

A few days later we found a half-page photograph in a paper put out for the prisoners. This showed a mob of French prisoners frantically raising their arms in a gesture which could be mistaken as the Nazi salute. I forget the precise reading of the caption, but it was to the effect that the French soldiers shown in the photograph were giving their enthusiastic adherence to the New Order.

The faith of the camp in German propaganda never recovered from the effects of this masterpiece.

There were plenty of other proofs of insincerity on the part of this propaganda, not only in there being dogs specially trained to attack anyone wearing a French uniform, but also in more civilized methods, such as the newspapers put out for the benefit of the prisoners.

There was a bi-weekly sheet called the *Trait d'Union*, the main purpose of which was to hold up to French prisoners the benefits of Hitlerism, and to prove to them that Germany wished nothing but good to France and that our country's only enemy was England.

This paper was obviously not meant to be read by the same people to whom *The Link* was addressed. This was put out for British prisoners and set itself to prove that Germany had only the friendliest feelings toward England, who, betrayed by the French, now found herself alone and without friends. And neither the *Trait d'Union* nor *The Link* had ever been intended to fall into the hands of Polish prisoners, who were obliged to read a paper prepared for

them by the same Ministry of Propaganda which had fathered the French and English papers. This proved twice a week, in what seemed to be rather approximate Polish, that France and Great Britain were together the worst enemies of Poland, whose only friend had always been Adolf Hitler's great German Reich.

It so happened that there were not only Frenchmen in our camp but also Poles, and that we would run into English prisoners reading *The Link*. The effect produced by the exchange of information on these German papers between the nationalities concerned should have discouraged the most ardent of their publishers. But whether through apathy, through routine, or more likely because it was impossible to change anything, the *Trait d'Union*, *The Link*, and the Polish newspaper continued, and still continue to appear, just as Goebbels created them, without taking any notice of each other.

All this and many other things made sceptics out of even the most credulous men. The experiences undergone with German propaganda rendered ineffective the most benevolent attempts to convert us, as for instance in the concrete case of a magnificent coloured poster showing a French sailor about to drown but proudly waving a French flag over his head, while the caption cordially invited us "not to forget Oran". Each barrack commander received six copies and was ordered to "display these posters in prominent places". The German non-com. who brought them appeared rather embarrassed and muttered that he had nothing to do with it but had received orders to see that the posters were put up. There was no way to get out of it, so the first day the posters decorated the walls exactly as they had left the press. The next day, however, in some barracks the captions were missing, thus depriving the poster of all meaning, whilst in others everything had been removed except for the French flag, which thereafter remained in the barrack. All six copies lost any allusion to their doubtful origin.

Into this mixture of scepticism, betrayed credulity, and a

rising spirit of resistance was poured a torrent of German martial music and the artificial news given forth by our loud-speakers. The dose was happily proportioned — a great deal of martial music and little news — so that no one could fail to be struck with the character, source, and aim of the news, preceded as it was by several hours of drums and brass.

But our most reliable information was that which we obtained ourselves. No one will ever know exactly where it came from in a camp one of whose chief aims was to preserve us from any contact with the outside world. The information filtered in from everywhere. Naturally the kitchens provided a large part of it, for they were frequented by a great many Germans from without the camp ; but the barracks containing the administrative employees, and especially those sheltering the men returning from Kommando work, were an equally abundant source. The infirmary, with its ramifications in various hospitals outside the camp, also served as a source of news, as did numerous other institutions, categories of prisoners, and even the Germans, about whom the time has not yet come to speak. At any rate we did not lack for news, and a lot of it was astonishingly accurate and detailed.

Of course, some of it was false, but even this had a certain value. For in a prisoners' camp fictitious rumours are not only a barometer of public opinion but also the latter's means of expressing itself.

Among the false reports there was one that had a particularly important reaction. This made its appearance and played its brief role one day in September 1940. It was a very rainy day, and the weather in our part of the country had become sunless and cold enough so that most of the men, who had never received any overcoats or caps, had little desire to go out. Nevertheless, toward evening, the waste land on the side of the camp from which could be seen the distant roofs and church towers of a small town was suddenly swarming with a gloomy and downcast mob of men oblivious of the rain, a mob that kept growing larger, saying

little but looking intently across the barbed wire toward the silhouettes of the distant town.

"If it's true, they'll be ringing the bells."

"And putting flags out."

"D'you think so? It's almost dark; they won't do it till tomorrow."

"D'you really think it's true? Perhaps they'll release us then."

"Idiot! If they've landed, we'll be here for the rest of our lives."

"Even if they do land in England, the war will only last longer."

"So what, we'd all be goners. Sure, the British wouldn't give up; they'd fight in Canada, in India, at the ends of the earth. But meanwhile, you'd have plenty of time to hand in your chips here. And to think there are still some dopes who don't give a damn and say all they want is a victory no matter who. D'you think you'll see your wife again if the Fritz wins? Maybe they'll make her come to you, what about that?"

It began to grow dark; the rain fell in a fine, persistent shower, soaking the ragged sweaters, making puddles in which hundreds and thousands of men floundered in shabby boots or wooden shoes, unwilling to go indoors.

The bells were not to ring that night, and the blood-red flags with their crooked crosses remained furled. Nor did they appear on the morrow. The news of the invasion of England had been false, but it had brought to life many men who had thought that the war no longer concerned them and made them realize that it was still *their* war; and it had aroused a deep hope within them that they had not dared to admit to for a long time.

IX

Camp Jobs

IN CIVILIAN LIFE HE HAD BEEN A FRANCISCAN PRIEST AND IN the Army an artillery sergeant, but I don't think he had ever enjoyed any position as much as the one he filled in camp. He was a member of the "peeling corps". To be on the "peeling corps", at least during the first part of our captivity, meant that you belonged to the true aristocracy of prisoners. To be included within the ranks of those who peeled potatoes for ten hours a day was to lead a secure life and be beyond the reach of even the slaver, who had no right to send "camp employees" on Kommando work. It was not only economic independence but almost complete freedom. Men who were on the "peeling corps" received an extra ration of bread and as much soup as they wanted; furthermore, they always managed to get away with two or three potatoes every day.

At a time when hundreds and thousands of men would be lined up outside the kitchen after every meal to search the garbage cans, when fifty francs were paid for a slice of bread, when the distribution of a few spoonfuls of soup among the barracks led every day to indescribable free-for-alls — nothing could equal the prestige of a kitchen employee. In exchange for the by-products of their work, these fortunates were able to secure unlimited luxuries — linen, clothes, fancy uniforms given them by enlisted non-coms., and cigarettes, not to mention money, which obviously at this time had a wholly arbitrary and fictitious value.

Of all the "soft jobs" created within the vast administrative organization of the camp, which today absorbs over 2000 men, not one held the attraction and prestige that the "peeling corps" did at the beginning of our sojourn. Naturally, as the prisoners became hardened to the endemic famine throughout the camp or, thanks to the arrival of

individual parcels and distributions by the Red Cross, their hunger began somewhat to recede, the desire to be admitted to their august body became less general, and the post of honour was transferred to other occupations. But no conceivable honour attained in civilian life by one of these men could equal the collective envy and respect that, in the summer of 1940, came with the right to peel mouldy potatoes.

Certainly in the long run there were to be more "distinguished" occupations. I'm not speaking about the barrack commanders who were appointed right at the beginning. But there were a great many jobs in the offices of the Kommandantur, such as secretaries, stenographers, interpreters, accountants, and orderlies. Then there was the postal service in which, under the watchful eyes of German non-coms., several hundred men were engaged in sorting and preparing for distribution the letters and packages of more than 120,000 men scattered through the camp and the Kommandos. There were also the indexes and the complex bookkeeping of the Labour bureau. And for the altogether ambitious, there was the job of policing the camp.

Of course, in order to fill the last-mentioned job it was necessary to be at least a quartermaster-sergeant. Both broad shoulders and broad-mindedness were needed to beat up one's fellow prisoners, should the Germans demand it. Generally the work consisted of maintaining order and discipline in co-operation with the German soldiers; it was not too hard and conferred upon the members of this auxiliary police force, aside from a stipend of three marks per week (all other camp employees getting only two), the right to wear a leather belt, a cane, and a yellow arm badge bearing the inscription *Polizei*. However, these respectable citizens were far more feared by the German civilians than by the prisoners. When one of these labourers, deliverymen, or truck drivers visiting camp saw the fearful badge from a distance, he would abruptly break off any conversation he might be having with a prisoner and hasten off at a great rate.

There were other jobs in the camp organization — jobs that in the beginning had not been very popular but had

become more and more desirable to men seeking a valid pretext for not being sent out on Kommando work. Thus, for instance, when the persecution of men unwilling to do forced labour was at its height and the slaver was tracking them down in every nook and cranny, huge crowds would collect before the shops of the camp shoemaker and tailor. The German non-coms who filled the roles of master shoemaker and master tailor did exceedingly well for themselves by admitting into their workshops, in return either for money or goods, a great many men, belonging to every social station, who were eager to pass themselves off as experienced craftsmen. This fraud on the part of the non-coms. could be justified by the fact that, as the needs of German industry became more demanding, they would be obliged by the Labour office to give up their real craftsmen, who were sent to factories making clothes for the army.

Moreover, taking into consideration the quality of the material handed over to the camp workshops for repairing the prisoners' effects, and also the system forced on this work by camp regulations, not even a company of real master craftsmen could have made much headway. As far as shoe-repairing went, it was a question of nailing patches of wood over any holes in the shoes ; and tailoring was done pretty much along the same lines. At any rate, this system had the advantage of keeping in camp for several months about two hundred of the best men, determined to do as little useful work for the Third Reich as they could. These two hundred "shoemakers" and "tailors" included professors, teachers, engineers, and lawyers ; there was even a famous pianist among them.

But there came a day when even this refuge could no longer offer security. An order came through from Berlin that no man liable for outside work could be employed in camp jobs and that the latter were to be assigned as fatigue duty to French non-coms. refusing to do Kommando work. The slave-trader went to work with joy.

"Pierre Vignard. Non-com. ? No ? Kommando. You say you're a typist in the camp office ? Who cares. Go

along, now; you wouldn't fool me, would you? Not accustomed to physical labour? Clerical worker in peacetime? Well, you'll soon learn to do physical labour. It'll do you good."

"Interpreter? Don't let that worry you; we'll find other interpreters. There aren't any? So what! We don't need any. Kommando."

"Trusty in your barrack? Nothing doing, your pals will have to do the best they can with a non-com. No more privates in camp."

Colonel Schwartzeneder was far from happy. Every day he saw his offices getting less efficient, his departments more disorganized. Complaints and lamentations from his chiefs and their subordinates kept flowing in. The indexes were disorganized. Several sergeants, taken from the colonials and told to classify the cards, had made a ghastly mess of them. Accounts were in complete chaos. So were the kitchens, the workshops, and the stores. Everywhere confusion and paralysis reigned.

The Colonel tried to reach some sort of compromise with Oberregierungsrat Braun, representing the Labour Ministry. Nothing doing. He appealed to the War Ministry. We heard the answer he received through some German soldiers doing orderly duty at the Kommandantur: "Request refused. So long as there are non-commissioned officers in camp who are not working, no private will be relieved from Kommando work."

The orderlies laughed. "The Colonel is furious. He's raging against civilians who meddle in everything, but there's nothing he can do about it."

No, there was nothing the poor Colonel could do. He lost one battle after another in his war against the "civilians". He lost the "battle of the musicians", and he even lost the "battle of the priests".

There were several orchestras in camp, including a woodwind orchestra, a jazz band, and a chamber *ensemble*, the latter composed of first-rate professional musicians, including even a few first prize winners of the Conservatoire.

These orchestras, playing instruments sent them by the Red Cross, gave evening concerts on Sundays and occasionally during the week for the entertainment of their friends. The Colonel, a great music-lover and extremely proud of the skill exhibited by "his" prisoners, often sat in on these concerts and at times invited other officers or civilian friends.

But the musicians, for the most part privates, soon attracted the interest of the Labour Ministry, an interest whose keenness was not lessened by the fact that it was not inspired by artistic considerations.

"Musicians? What for? In war-time there is no need for them. You can keep the non-coms. among them, but we'll take the privates."

The Colonel no longer dared to protest. But he made a final explosion when the Labour Ministry demanded "his" priests. In the beginning the priests among the line privates had been sent off to do Kommando work like everyone else. However, in the country, a deeply Catholic section, the peasants had refused to treat men they knew to be priests as prisoners liable to heavy work. They had looked after them and venerated them to such a point that numerous scandals resulted. To put an end to this, the Kommandantur had brought these men back to camp and installed them in a special barrack.

Now the Labour Ministry was asking for them again. The Colonel objected. He managed to obtain a delay in their departure, using as pretext the approaching visit of the Papal Nuncio from Berlin, who had announced that he would visit the camp. But the Nuncio was delayed. The Labour Ministry had no time to spare, and one day the priests were assembled. They were slated to leave for an isolated Kommando in the midst of a swampy region, where they would carry out drainage operations. This was to eliminate any embarrassing contact with the German population. When they went off, each one carried, besides his luggage, a heavy coil of barbed wire with which he would help to build his camp.

There are not many "soft jobs" in the camp now. It

contains only non-commissioned officers "unwilling to work" but who work just the same — as a fatigue, and strictly according to international conventions.

In Germany, international conventions are more than elastic.

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X

The Market

THE MARKET SUDDENLY CAME INTO BEING ONE DAY, TOWARD the beginning of July, in front of the tents. There was a mass influx of colonial troops. As usual, while waiting to be searched, disinfected, and registered, the new arrivals had been isolated in tents. Suddenly the news spread through the camp that they had brought unexpected treasures with them, that in the tents were cigarettes, preserves, clothes, linen — all sorts of fabulous things. There was an immediate rush which turned out to be well worth while. Miraculously a group of Arabian bazaars had been set up on the rain-soaked ground in front of the huge white tents, with the barbed-wire entanglements and distant village steeples lending a strange background. There were Moroccans, Tunisians, Algerians, Negroes, men of every tribe and race. I never knew how they had been able to get through the numerous searches by the Germans and carry on their persons the merchandise which they were now offering for sale. They had jewellery, lingerie such as silk stockings and brassières, shoes, sweaters, even all sorts of tools. Unfortunately there was not very much to eat and little to smoke, which led to prohibitive prices for edibles and cigarettes. Nevertheless these were sold. I saw someone pay 1000 francs for a packet of English cigarettes. For some reason that I did not understand until later, prisoners were purchasing gold bracelets, lingerie, and other seemingly useless objects. In a few days I saw these things in the hands of German officers and soldiers who would resell them to civilians.

The German authorities, at least officially, frowned on this trade, especially since they considered that the merchandise thus being sold belonged to them anyway as "war booty". War booty, according to the Kommandantur, was

everything we wore, including our uniforms and even our personal linen. During the searches, the Germans were accustomed to despoil us of everything which, according to them, was not strictly necessary; depending on the day and on the officer in charge of the search, new arrivals might find themselves stripped of everything down to a single change of linen. The market, then, from its early inception among the chaotic and picturesque bazaars, was the constant object of a kindly solicitude on the part of the Kommandantur, so that the tents were subjected to frequent descents by the camp police, who would surround the whole neighbourhood, loose the dogs, and charge down on the prisoners, brandishing their clubs. Each time, there was a mad scramble: a number of prisoners would be bitten by the dogs and often frightfully mutilated; others would have their heads broken by the clubs, while a fair percentage of them would be arrested and put in prison. An important collection of articles would be requisitioned, having either been abandoned by the fleeing men or taken from prisoners who were caught.

But a market had been created, and nothing could be done to suppress it. And it would have come into being without the bazaars, for, although boycotted for a long time by a great many prisoners who condemned the money-grabbing spirit that put a price on the least service rendered by anyone, it filled a great need. Obviously, however, it could not be considered a market until a surplus of goods existed in the camp. During the first weeks of absolute and general misery the camp was full of men who had lost everything and had come all the way from the battle-front to the camp wearing nothing but shirts, pants, and boots, often without even sweaters. Under these circumstances, trade could naturally not be based on very sound economic foundations.

True, it existed, but under rather one-sided conditions: a prisoner who by a miracle had been able to save either a wrist-watch or a fountain-pen from the various searches, would be accosted by a German offering him some cigar-

ettes or a piece of bread in exchange. Similar offers would be made for bits of uniform, Army boots, and woollen goods, which, even in poor condition, found purchasers among civilians, not to mention such rare treasures as leather jackets, leggings, or belts. Leather jackets were priced as high as three pieces of bread weighing 1000 grams each. I shall always remember a certain foreman of a construction gang who, with the connivance of some of the camp guard, carried on a tremendous trade. Each morning he would bring into camp a great many loaves, to be sold by the slice, and would leave the same evening with entire wheelbarrows full of Army and civilian things to be sold "outside". But all this was in the beginning. The real market had not yet made its appearance. There were still several stages through which it had to pass before attaining its final form. First there was the trade imposed by the Germans. Then came the Arab bazaars. And it suffered still another transformation when the boys from the Maginot Line began to arrive.

The boys from the Maginot Line arrived one day toward the end of July, several regiments of them, loaded down with heavy packs. Their appearance was vastly different from what ours had been on arrival, for they were clean and shaven. They carried their entire equipment, including pack, rations, canteen, and utensils. At first the Kommandantur had shut them up in barracks strictly guarded by armed guards and dogs, but that same evening a few daring individuals had succeeded in contacting these guards. They were well rewarded, for in spite of receiving numerous bites and bruises they had returned with amazing riches : chocolate, tobacco, hard-tack, tins of jam, beef, paté, sardines, and countless other legendary souvenirs of a distant past. And they also brought back the news that the Maginot prisoners were not really prisoners but "prisoners of honour". It is true that neither the "prisoners of honour" nor anyone else knew quite what the term meant. But in any case these units, which had remained passively in their forts without firing, but also without giving themselves up until the end of June, were not persuaded to come out until a week after the

armistice had been signed, and then only with the assurance that they could carry away everything but their arms and be treated as "prisoners of honour".

As far as honour went, they were no longer to be shown much, but the designation and status of prisoners were to remain theirs. Nevertheless they still had their possessions, and during the first days of their captivity, both for the sake of friendliness and because they were certain that their "title" meant immediate repatriation, they distributed them freely or sold them at low prices. It was not long before all this new merchandise had dropped from sight.

But it had not disappeared for ever. Though most of the men had greedily and thoughtlessly swallowed everything they could lay their hands on, later events showed us that there were some who had not only hung on to their share but also gone on to buy and stock large quantities of merchandise. The profiteer had been born, and from then on it was he who controlled the economic life of the camp.

In the succeeding weeks the bulk of trade passed from the Arabs, who had merely resold what they had been able to carry on them, into the hands of professional profiteers, while the bazaar market in front of the tents was transferred to a more central location in a more fashionable quarter. This was in the middle of the "Champs Élysées", on the great square in front of the canteen, the very centre of camp. It was not long before the market began keeping regular hours: after the noon meal, that is, from half-past eleven until a few minutes before the assembly of work parties for that afternoon; and in the evening it reopened at six o'clock and did business until nightfall.

From a distance it took on the appearance of a huge crowd milling about aimlessly within a space measuring fifty by forty yards. But a closer approach would reveal hundreds of men holding all sorts of unexpected objects in their hands: linen, woollens, shoes; cigarettes and tobacco; canned foods, cheese, and bread; needles and thread; watches and fountain-pens, and even compasses and road maps. There was literally nothing that could not be ordered

through middlemen, for a number of things, such as civilian clothes or other objects, too dangerous to be exhibited, were carefully hidden and shown only to serious buyers. In any event, the markets that existed in every camp were certainly the only places in Germany where free trade still survived without hindrance, and where there was a constant flow of goods which, not only in Germany but throughout Europe, had become but a memory.

The things sold were the remnants of war stocks collected by thrifty French families, remnants that gradually found their way to the camps inside any rare parcels that were permitted; they also consisted of what was left of the personal linen and woollen effects of the prisoners, which reached them by these same parcels. As for the civilian clothes, compasses, maps, and so forth, that was another story. Obviously these could not be in the official parcels. But no one really cared where they came from; it was enough that they were for sale.

The vendors of these articles made up a varied group. First of all came the occasional traders, men in possession of something they had acquired by chance and wanted to get rid of, either in order to obtain ready cash or to barter for something else. But there were also a great many professional marketeers and their canvassers, for in this camp as in every camp there were real department stores run by prisoners who were particularly resourceful and not very scrupulous. These were men who had cornered the market on all sorts of articles that were relatively abundant, buying and selling everything and even employing a greater or lesser number of men in their "enterprise".

Naturally prices were determined by supply and demand, for behind the barbed wire there existed a curious anachronism to be found in no other part of Europe. There, as though out of sheer spite, the laws of free trade survived. Prices varied according to the arrival of parcels. If there were many, or if the Red Cross made a distribution, prices tended to be low; but if the mails functioned badly and supplies for the market depended entirely on the monopoly estab-

lished by the hoarders, they showed an immediate and disastrous tendency to rise.

Officially prices were quoted in marks. But francs were also accepted. For of course there was an exchange as well as a market in the camp. No one could deny that such an institution was needed, for there was no other way to determine the value of the various currencies circulating through the camp — French francs, Belgian francs, Polish zlotys, Yugoslav dinars, and English pounds, not to mention both "camp" marks and "town" marks.

In theory, all foreign currencies were forbidden, since the Germans seized everything they found on us as "war booty", and all marks other than those used in camp were equally taboo. But the prisoners, in spite of, or rather because of, the barbed wire that separated them from the "freedom" of the Greater Reich, never ceased to find means of escaping a great many of the rules and regulations presumed to govern their lives. Thus there were both foreign currencies and a free exchange in the camp. And the currency exchange was determined according to criteria that would have raised the hair on the head of the Reichsbank president and that, if applied for only one day throughout the rest of Germany, would have led to the collapse of the whole Nazi economic system.

The career of the mark in camp, from the first days of captivity, reflected the entire evolution of the prisoners' attitude toward Germany. In the beginning it had a tremendous boom. It was known that in France the exchange imposed by the Germans was 20 francs per mark. But in camp during the first weeks it went up to 100 francs. This, however, did not last long. As the prisoners realized that the Germans were not succeeding in their long-heralded invasion of England, it sank lower and lower. In the winter of 1940-41 it was valued at between 15 and 18 francs, falling to 6 francs at the start of the Balkan campaign but rising to 12 afterward.

To all intents and purposes the mark had no value for a prisoner who did not even possess ration cards; if he did,

then it could be assigned a small buying power. If the mark stayed alive at all it was because the gifts of money sent from France were paid to the men at the official rate of 20 francs, and especially because there was always a certain demand on the exchange for "town" marks on the part of those planning escape.

In the weird application of the economic laws observed by the camp, a distinction was at all times made between the "camp" mark, specially created for the prisoners and of no value outside the camp, and the "town" mark, which was the reichsmark. In the beginning the "town" mark was worth more than that of the camp. But later it fell to par and then sank even lower. For "camp" marks were legal tender in the market, where merchandise was still obtainable, whereas the reichsmark was legal tender only in Germany, where nothing could be obtained. When at last even beer was rationed, the "town" mark incurred the shame of almost never finding a buyer in camp.

XI

Disorder in the New Order

"SUNDAY MORNING THERE WILL BE A GENERAL ROLL-CALL behind the kitchens. Each barrack commander will be responsible for the presence of his men. Each man will carry his number plate. During the roll-call, the barracks will be searched. The search parties will have orders to fire on anyone they find in the barracks; the dogs will be let loose in the rest of the camp during assembly."

Why this unwonted assembly? Didn't we have a strict roll-call every morning? Didn't the barrack commanders give a detailed report on their men to the German non-coms. every day? In spite of the multitude of records, the lists of names and numbers, the detailed statistics required every day, in spite of innumerable card indexes and a fantastic amount of red tape, was the Kommandantur still uncertain of the exact number of its charges? It was.

One day it woke up to the fact that it was two thousand men short and had lost all trace of them. Two thousand men who had been registered, photographed, measured from every angle, put down in every index, and who nevertheless had simply vanished from one day to the next.

Incidents of this nature were not at all peculiar to our camp. They were continually happening in every branch of German administration, and had reached a point when they came to the ears of the international Red Cross. There could be no other explanation for the announcement that appeared in the *Trait d'Union* during the first part of 1941. This brought up the fact that an entire trainload of French prisoners had disappeared, after leaving Rennes on a certain date which I have forgotten (the announcement gave the number of cars in the train, the day and hour of its departure, and other details), and asked anyone who knew what had happened to the convoy to inform the international Red

Cross. A similar announcement that appeared during the same period asked for information on the whereabouts of a whole prisoners' camp in Upper Silesia, which had been transferred "elsewhere" and all trace of which had been lost by the German administration.

Nevertheless, the organization and control of prisoners' camps are well carried out. Probably too well carried out. For the camps have not only one administrative body but several, all of which are imposing and even frightening. But to see them in action gives one the impression that they are less concerned with frightening the prisoners than with frightening each other. Since this bureaucratic nightmare is one of the regime's inherent vices and since the following revelation of its functioning or rather non-functioning will not enable the Nazis to improve it, a description should be of interest.

Contrary to what the layman may believe, camps for war prisoners in Germany are only partially under military authority. Of course, each camp is commanded by an Army officer of high rank, a lieutenant-colonel or colonel. But the Army officer is far from being the only authority.

The distinguished visitor on a tour of inspection, the Red Cross representative, the delegate of some prisoners' aid committee, the traveller from a neutral country, see only the colonel or other officers well on in years, who represent the old imperial army school and are well-mannered, punctilious, even polite. They never see behind these the gentlemen in S.S. uniform or in civilian clothes, representing the Gestapo and the Labour Ministry. They are the real masters.

"We have no other role but that of guardian," a Wehrmacht officer was saying the other day in answer to a delegate from the prisoners who had come to complain of certain demands made by the Oberregierungsrat of the Labour Ministry. And this was practically true. With regard to prisoners of war, the Army functions in the role of guardian, but it is not, or in only a very restricted sense, the master

of the men confided to its care. As a means of blackmailing their native countries, the prisoners come under the jurisdiction of Germany's political organization, particularly the Gestapo; as reservoirs of man-power, their camps are supervised by the Labour Ministry.

What was left for the Army to do? It was to organize the daily life of the prisoners, maintain discipline, and keep index files. And in this it did not stint itself.

Indexes? There were plenty of these. At the Kommandantur, for the military departments alone, there were at least six different indexes besides the main index containing a general description of each man. There was an index of "nationalities" (Flemings, Normans, Basques, Bretons); there was one of "races" (Aryans, Jews, Negroes, Arabs); there were others classifying men by occupation, by age, by regiment, by branch of service — it would not be surprising if after the war it were discovered at the Kommandantur for camps indexes, classifying men by height.

These indexes were kept up to date by impressive statistics based on daily reports by the barrack commanders and by the Kommandos. Every morning each barrack commander had to furnish a detailed numerical report on his men, minutely showing the apportionment of men by nationality and military rank, giving the exact number of men working in or out of the camp and of those available for work parties; the number of men sick at the morning call and of men in the infirmary or hospital would complete the report, which was cast into the hungry mill of the Kommandantur, to undergo a careful, scrupulous, and suspicious verification. And every day this verification met with the most stupefying result: the number of men was never correct!

And how could it possibly ever be correct? The day before, Herr Sonderfuehrer Schwarz may have thrown twenty-three men into prison after hearing from his spies that they had been making "anti-German propaganda", and in the zest of performing his duty forgotten to notify the Kommandantur, more especially since he is "not under the

Colonel's orders" and does not see why he should be accountable to the military authorities. Furthermore, Herr Oberregierungsrat Braun of the *Landesarbeitsamt* may have needed five hundred men for an urgent piece of work, so urgent that he collected them from the barracks without notifying the Kommandantur. Prisoner Dupont Pierre, Number 123592, from Barrack 49, may have pretended sickness and, claiming he had to go to the infirmary, had himself struck off the roll-call of the barrack. After a few weeks it will be noticed that he didn't even make a pretence of going to the infirmary, which knows nothing about him, but, taking advantage of the fact that his absence from the barrack would seem normal, merely joined illegally a work party leaving on Kommando duty and departed from it at the earliest opportunity. S.S. Standartenfuehrer Mueller, enjoying a walk in the country and coming across a Kommando party doing a job which he considers superfluous, may have taken it upon himself to transfer these men to another location where more important work was to be done — for instance, to his own farm, where the potato harvest was not being gathered quickly enough. It may be the end of the week before their departure is noticed, and months will pass till the group is located and a check made to see which ones did not take advantage of the transfer to escape. And then there is Private Pachulke Fritz, on orderly duty at the first gate of the camp. He is supposed to put a red mark in his book for each man leaving the camp and a black mark for each man entering. Unfortunately he counted the same group of a dozen men five times without realizing that it was always the same prisoners. And there is his colleague at the last gate, who marked down in the exit column a party of a hundred and twenty men who should have been marked as entering.

And that still does not take into account the fifty-odd prisoners who escaped from Kommando parties the same day. Or the results of a thousand other schemes, errors, and tricks. Or, in particular, Ernest (Ernestine to his friends), the young and promising son of a high Nazi dignitary who fills the post of secretary at the Kommandantur. For

Ernest, the personal emissary of Providence for those who know and are able to profit by his friendliness, has in a single day, first, for a bar of chocolate, caused the disappearance from the main index of the card relating to prisoner Vandermeulen, who will thus be able to escape without his description being sent out to the police. Secondly, he has, for 5000 francs, transformed a prisoner of Jewish origin into an Aryan, besides giving him a card that will enable him to move into another barrack. Again, for a tin of sardines, he has carried out the necessary changes in the various indexes so that a white non-commissioned officer of colonial troops has thereby become a coloured private, for inclusion in the next batch of Moroccans to be repatriated.

How, then, under such conditions, can the number be correct? The commanding colonel of the camp may well establish at the general roll-call that the number of those present corresponds "approximately" to that furnished the same morning on the basis of individual barrack roll-calls. But he is still several hundred men short of the number he had the day before. Furthermore, there is the fact that the result of the roll-call corresponds only "approximately" to the morning figure. What is particularly annoying is that the difference represents a surplus rather than a deficit. Apparently there were men living in the camp who are not on any list. Who they are, what they do, and how to find them presents a tremendous problem. They found one once when the number plates were checked. He had no identity disc, not a single paper, wore a Polish uniform, had entered the camp in some mysterious fashion, and had been living there for an unknown period of time. He could not be identified, for he kept a stubborn silence in spite of the most rigorous cross-examination. The colonel was happy to hand him over, together with all the dangerous problems his case presented, to the Gestapo. And now there was another surplus of men, unknown men hiding in an anonymous crowd. Obviously the indexes were useless, all this supervision had no effect, and no one could be trusted.

Colonel Schwartzeneder may roar at his staff officers,

Captain Beck threaten to send the adjutant of the police station to the front, or the adjutant take it out on the miserable non-coms. in charge of the barracks, they will never completely control the thousands of prisoners confined to their care. While as for the indexes, however orderly and proper they may look, they will never reflect the true state of things. The military authorities blame it all on the blunders committed by their rivals in the Gestapo and Labour Ministry, and there is much truth in their accusation. But there is nothing they can do about it.

Even that is not the only explanation for the confusion. So long as the multiple administrative services of the camp are directed by middle-aged civilians in uniform who fail to see the necessity for showing a great deal of foresight and initiative, the services will be dependent on the co-operation of the prisoners. And that, too, cannot be changed. For it would be impossible to transfer enough soldiers from the Army to ensure the proper functioning of everything down to the minor clerical work required by the administration of a camp containing more than 120,000 men. It is a physical impossibility to prevent these prisoners from indulging in a little discreet sabotage whenever they know they cannot be caught, and tampering with the indexes so that no one will notice from one day to another that a number of cards are missing and that others have been slightly altered. Furthermore, the German soldiers themselves, who are old and lack enthusiasm and who are in daily contact with the same prisoners, cannot be prevented from doing favours for them, especially if the favours are often recompensed by material gifts such as edibles or articles of clothing of a kind extremely rare in Germany.

There is still something else, possibly the fundamental reason for administrative inefficiency. If Germany has a reputation for being (or for having been, since this is far from being a Nazi innovation) an orderly country, it is not due only to her meticulous and pedantic administration. It is due in equal part to the fact that the Germans themselves have a fanatic respect for the orders given them by that

administration, and that they would never dream of doing whatever is *verboten*. There is a famous tale relating to the revolution of 1918. A German officer ordered his men to fire on a huge crowd gathered in front of the imperial palace in Berlin. Behind this revolutionary crowd was a strip of earth planted with grass, and in the mad rush which followed not one of the mob dared to use the quickest way out of danger because it was *verboten* to walk on the grass. Another story about this same period tells how an anti-republican regiment was able to capture an important town because the workers who had come to prevent them from leaving the train could not enter the station as they had no platform tickets.

In a German administration carried out by Germans for Germans, the indexes will always represent the real situation. For, when a German has to settle some question with the authorities, he will seek to attain his end by following the straight path prescribed for him by established procedure. On the other hand, a Frenchman, always sceptical about an administration, and particularly about one which keeps him a prisoner, will try from the very first to do things his own way. That is a procedure not provided for in camp regulations or on index cards — which is why they will never correspond to reality, why the statistics will always be false, and why this camp, situated on German soil, surrounded by German barbed wire, and run by Germans, will never come under the complete control of the colonel, any more than his compatriots will control the vast concentration camp which they have made of Europe.

XII

Our Hosts

THE BARRACK WAS IN AN UPROAR.

"I don't know why I didn't beat his brains out. Good God! It's got to stop!" Vandamme, livid with rage and trembling in every limb, was leaning against the barrack wall. A broad crimson welt, already beginning to turn black and blue, ran across his left cheek from ear to chin. From his upper lip a stream of blood ran down, which he tried in vain to wipe away.

All the men in the barrack at the time were crowded around Vandamme in a semicircle, everybody talking at once.

"Stinking *boche*! And to think we have to put up with that sort of thing."

"Put up with it? Didn't you see what happened in Number 60 this morning? One of the men stepped out of line and socked the sergeant a good one right in the face. And what d'you think the Fritz did? Nothing! He shot his revolver off into the air to scare the men, but he didn't even report what happened to the Kommandantur. He knows he'd be the first to get hell!"

"Sure, but don't forget the fellow who socked the sergeant probably figured he couldn't get in any worse trouble than he was in already; he was slated for the disciplinary camp anyway."

"And then what about the dogs; how can you do anything with them around? If the Fritz hadn't had his monster with him, he wouldn't even have dared to come in here."

"Oh, the dogs, the dogs! I'm sick of seeing hundreds of men running like rabbits when they see one of *them*. We ought to do what the Arabs do. Remember the Arab who broke the forelegs of a dog that jumped him?"

The conversation became more and more confused, losing itself in a pointless jabbering which, in spite of the hatred vibrating in the men's voices, reflected their helplessness and bewilderment before the scene that had just taken place.

The barrack had been honoured with a visit by the *Hundeführer*. Corporal August Bergmann had command of the men charged with caring for the police dogs ; he was notorious throughout the camp for his brutality. A foul-tempered and foul-tongued little man, about five foot three, he was repulsively squat and brutish, and more often than not in his cups. A peasant from a small Bavarian village, he was completely illiterate and spoke a vulgar *patois* in which, however, he was extremely voluble. He was one of the convinced Nazis in camp, and in his endless speeches, delivered in a tone which strived to emulate the vocal powers of the " great " leaders, he incessantly boasted of Germany's greatness.

He burst into the barrack that morning, preceded by his dog, a particularly fierce brute, which he fortunately kept on a leash. In a voice which he tried in vain to raise above the thunder of Fido, who was frenziedly straining at his leash and trying to leap at somebody's throat, he ordered the man who had just shaken his blanket out before the door to step forward. When there was no reply, he flew into a fury.

" You bunch of yellow-bellied rats ! Filthy French swine ! Only the French would shake out their blankets on the road. They call themselves the '*grande nation*', and they're full of fleas which they shake into the street. If the pig who did it doesn't show himself right away, I'll let the dog loose and take the first one he bites. I'll count till three."

" One . . . two . . . "

A dead silence. Hypnotized, the whole barrack stared at the *Hundeführer*, who was bending down to unleash the dog.

Suddenly a voice spoke up from the other end of the barrack :

"I shook the blanket."

Vandamme walked up to the front through the men, not one of whom budged. He was pale but walked with a firm step, looking straight into the eyes of Corporal Bergmann. Everyone knew that he had not shaken out the blanket. Halting about a yard away, just out of reach of the frantic dog, he stood there silently, looking at Bergmann.

The latter for a moment lost his voice. It was an awkward moment. Vandamme topped Bergmann by a head. But Bergmann was in control of the situation, and he knew it. He had the dog and he had his crop. He also had the authority. Suddenly he began to shout and yell in German and deliver a speech which obviously had the effect of self-intoxication ; each word he uttered built him up a little more in his own eyes.

It was a long and incoherent speech, starting with how dirty the French were, shaking their blankets out in the street when it was forbidden. It continued with a eulogistic enumeration of the municipal police regulations which in every German town prohibited the shaking of rugs over the street after 9 A.M., whereas in France the streets were filthy and full of refuse. This philosophical preamble led the *Hundeführer* toward considerations of high politics, put forth in a voice that gradually increased in volume. So these were the wretched idiots who had the gall to declare war on Germany ! It was they who wanted to teach us *Kultur*, these people who shake out their blankets in the street after nine o'clock !

The corporal had worked himself up into a real froth ; his speech had restored his confidence and confirmed him in the conviction of his superiority. The man before him still looked him straight in the eye. Not knowing German, much less Bavarian, he had understood nothing of all this but could hardly fail to be aware of its general meaning. His look was scornful, and even haughty ; the corporal, small and misshapen, as far removed from the Aryan ideal as possible, quite suddenly felt embarrassed before this "sub-man" who stood a head taller than he and was, moreover,

blond. Therefore, because a prisoner must not be allowed to have the upper hand, because the self-intoxication produced by his pompous speech must not disappear, and because his embarrassment must not grow any further, Bergmann raised his crop and with all his might slashed it across the face of the man in front of him.

Vandamme never moved. Another blow. Still another. Then complete silence. With a hurried movement that was very nearly flight, Corporal Bergmann went out of the barrack, followed by his reluctant dog.

Herr Weberstedt was truly heart-broken over the incident, for he was a good man. Having seen the welt left by the crop, he had the story related to him. He liked Vandamme, for he knew that the latter was in command of a section and immensely popular with his men; he had often admired the scrupulous care with which Vandamme distributed equal portions of soup, potatoes, and the miscellaneous gifts of the Red Cross among his men. Later on he came into the barrack, asked to see Vandamme, and had the interpreter come up. Then, with an awkward gesture, he pulled a little paper bag from the pocket of his tunic.

"Tell him it's for him," he said; "it was in a parcel my wife sent me."

The bag was full of little sweets, red and green fruit-drops, stuck together from the heat of the tunic. It was embarrassing, for everyone liked Weberstedt, or at least did not dislike him. But Vandamme hesitated to accept such an absurd gift under the circumstances. Weberstedt's hand holding the bag remained out.

He said, "Tell him I complained to the disciplinary officer because the regulation forbids the striking of prisoners. He bawled me out and dismissed me. You mustn't give these skunks any excuse. Your life's hard enough without trying to make it still more unbearable."

Weberstedt was ill at ease. It was obvious that there was something else he wanted to say but didn't quite know whether he dared. He took several tentative steps toward

the door. An old worker whom years of hard work and unemployment had treated badly, he was not, any more than Bergmann, an example of the perfect Aryan. He turned around and came back. Above the collar of his tunic, his Adam's apple was jerking up and down spasmodically. He was a large man, with a girth that had plainly not been foreseen by the German Army tailors. There were wrinkles all down his tunic, and his belt sagged in front.

Suddenly he made up his mind. "D'you think I'm any better off than you? We're all prisoners: you, your friends, I, and all the others."

The interpreter translated for Vandamme. With an abrupt movement the latter stuffed Weberstedt's ridiculous present into his pocket. This move seemed to release some kind of floodgate in the German's mind, for an astonishing torrent of words poured from his lips.

"I was in the last war. Look." He showed the scar left by a bullet that had entered one side of his neck and gone out of the other. "Look at this." He bared his right forearm, on which a deep, ugly scar ran all the way up to the elbow. "And my back. And my left leg. And what did I get for thanks? Five years of unemployment after 1918; no job again from 1931 to 1934. If my wife hadn't been there to feed us, me and the four kids . . . She's a good woman, and now she's all alone. I still have some luck, because I'm old and they put me here; but my oldest boy is in France, the second in Norway, and the third in the Labour Corps. He'll become a soldier in March, and my daughter is in the *Landhilfe*.

"And that's been going on for years. You think this war is going to make us happy? We're eating even worse than before. It's like in 1914-18, only worse. I can't tell you everything; there are spies everywhere, even among the Frenchmen, men who don't only denounce their own comrades but the German soldiers too. In any case, the rest of us, fellows like me, almost the whole German people — d'you think we're getting any more out of life than you prisoners or the civilians in occupied countries? War!

It's always the same, and it's always the same people who profit. Why don't they fight each other and let us alone? Let Hitler fight Churchill by himself if he wants, or Roosevelt; the others — you and I and the rest of the world — will just look on, and when it's all over we'll go home and hang the ones that are left!"

"That's not quite right," answered Vandamme through the interpreter. "Germans who think like you should understand that an Allied victory against Hitler will help them too. For if England wins you'll be rid of the Nazi regime."

"Well, yes, that's what I thought in the beginning. But it often seems to me that they're not fighting the war against Hitler at all. D'you think Hitler could have become what he is without foreign assistance? And are the same foreigners who financed him, who supported him both before and after 1933, going to rid us of him today?"

He thought for a moment, then hesitated. We could see he wanted to say something, but he changed his mind, smiled bleakly, and then said with a sly look:

"After all, we're the ones who'll always come out on the short end. Personally, I don't believe in anything now. There's only one answer, and I've always said it, even back in '14. The only way to have peace is for each man to be separated from his neighbour by a five-hour walk. Man is a brute, but if he had to walk fifteen miles to sock his neighbour in the jaw he'd think twice about it."

He stopped suddenly, pulled out his watch and saw that it was eleven o'clock, the midday roll-call for the Germans.

"I have to go now. Eat the drops; they're from my wife." Turning on his heels, he started out, his gait resembling that of a sick penguin.

Weberstedt's outburst made less of an impression than might be supposed when it came under discussion in a confidential group of trusted men that night. Practically every one of the men could cite cases where German soldiers

had behaved in a manner quite different from what one would expect.

"But they're all the old ones," said Colson. "Can you think of a single one of the younger men who's been agreeable?"

It was true. And yet perhaps it might be due to the fact that even the prisoners who had done Kommando work had never been in contact with or even seen the younger ones. And certainly had not observed them as closely as the oldsters who had charge of the indoor jobs in prisoners' camps. The few they had seen were all of the order of Corporal Bergmann: egocentric brutes.

"The others will wake up some day, too. Just wait till they take a tumble somewhere. It'll be the end of them."

"Yes, but it won't be the same. Whatever you say, someone like Weberstedt, even if he is German, has spent the greater part of his life in an environment that isn't very different from ours. When I hear him talking about his life, or about '14, it reminds me of our own workers. But the young ones act as though they came from another planet."

"Oh, always the old ones! Sure, some of them are all right. They're not satisfied with things. They don't even agree with the regime. But they do the same things the others do, maybe unwillingly, and without much enthusiasm, but they do it just the same. Remember the story told by the fellow from some camp or other where the Kommandantur had set up a special enclosure for Jews? There you are. They'd put them in charge of an old adjutant who was supposed to break them in and so on. Well, after the first roll-call, the adjutant took one of them aside and told him that he'd been a fool to declare himself a Jew, and that he couldn't understand why the ones who could have got out of it didn't. It was quite obvious that the German didn't like his job at all, but d'you think that made him carry it out any less conscientiously?"

But everyone agreed that there were some strange cases among the older German soldiers in camp. There was the story of a certain non-com. who had a habit of pointing out

to the French barrack commander which of his men were stool-pigeons planted by the Kommandantur. He would say, "They are my enemies as well as yours." There were a few other older non-coms., mostly workers, who from time to time would bring pieces of bread they had saved from mess and distribute them among prisoners they knew without asking for anything in exchange, and particularly, a remarkable and significant fact, among the "red" Spaniards captured during the German advance in France, the majority of whom received neither letters nor parcels. And there was an old Latin professor disguised as a German warrior, who had started up a friendship with some French priests among the prisoners; he held long and involved conversations with them in which he heaped abuse — in Latin — on Hitler, Goebbels, Goering, and the whole regime. Before the war he had been on the staff of a Catholic school in Austria.

Of course, the fact that they were seeing the same prisoners every day had a lot to do with the attitude of some of the Germans. They had not been relieved for a long time and had had the opportunity to strike up friendships among their prisoners. Many of them revealed things to the prisoners which they immediately asked them not to repeat to other Germans. The political past and thoughts of certain guards were far better known to some of the prisoners than they were to other guards. The non-com. in charge of Barrack 11 had been a Social Democrat; a number of others in charge of barracks had belonged to the syndicalist movement since their early youth, and there were some who made guarded allusions to the Communist Party. One, a practising Catholic, had belonged to the clerical party. They hid nothing from the prisoners they knew, but it was perfectly clear that they would never talk that way to any other German.

There was even one who had spent a year in a concentration camp for having kept up his membership in a socialist party after Hitler had come to power. But this man was obviously a mental case. A blaster in a mine, he had been unemployed for many years after his release, the court having

forbidden him to manipulate explosives. In camp he would go from one extreme to the other. At times he was capable of making the most violent speeches against the Nazi regime to the prisoners in his barrack and putting all the blame on the French for not having defeated Hitler ; in spite of this, he had been seen several times in a high state of intoxication, beating up men he met on the road with the utmost brutality, taking advantage of the presence of an armed sentinel or the *Hundeführer* with his dog.

The personnel guarding these camps made up a strange assortment, altogether very different from the uniformly Nazi masses of the invasion armies in the early part of 1940. It was a clear reflection of the change that gradually took place in the German Army as military and political necessities demanded the addition of considerable numbers of men. More and more, in the Army branches visible to the prisoners — camps, Kommandos, and even occupation troops — the mechanized fanatic of the steel age, so dear to Adolf Hitler, gave way to the foot-soldier who had matured long before the advent of the Third Reich, to a civilian poorly disguised as a soldier, whose uniform could not conceal his past or certain habits described by official propaganda as belonging to "another age".

These artificial soldiers were not far removed, in their lack of zeal, from certain factory workers who advised the prisoners "not to work too fast". They were fathers of families who would cast avid glances at the food arriving in packages from France and would beg or try to buy chocolate for their children ; they were men who were far from heroic — men who complained to the prisoners about the insufficient rations allotted to their families and about the poor health of their children.

XIII

Kommandos

THE MAN WHO ONCE FALLS INTO THE CLUTCHES OF THE slaver, scheduled to be sent on his way the next morning, seldom knows where he is bound for. On the morrow, still unenlightened, he is packed into a box car or a bus, together with a few score or, more often, several hundred other men, carrying everything he has in the world on him, and is promptly sent off to the location of his Kommando. For these Kommandos, or, to give them their official designation, the *Arbeitskommandos*, are many and varied, as are also the working conditions to be found in each.

It may be that, on arrival at his destination, he will find himself lined up with his comrades in the market-place of a small town, before a group of peasants who look him over with an appraising eye as though they were at a cattle fair, feeling his muscles and quarrelling loudly among themselves over the pick of the strongest and best workers.

Or he may suddenly find himself in the middle of a forest, set down with a few friends inside a very primitive but tightly-sealed barracks enclosure, which is to be his home for an indefinite period. There he will have to take orders from the foreman of the woodcutters' crew, and German soldiers will be detailed to guard him while he chops trees in his dense fastness, so remote as to seem that the world has passed it by completely.

Or else he may be sent to a Kommando that is constructing a highway, or a landing field, or fortifications, or repairing a railway. In that case he will be living outdoors under the most rigorous conditions. He will be forced to do the hardest kind of work for twelve hours a day and will probably have to cover a long stretch of ground to get to and from work each morning and evening. Besides his country-

men, he will often be forced to work side by side with common German criminals.

But he may also be turned over to an industrial Kommando. If this happens, he will be placed in a factory manufacturing war materials and compelled to do the same amount of work as the German workers, from ten to twelve hours a day or night, depending on what shift he has been assigned to. His work finished, instead of going home to a comfortable chair and a hot dinner like the other workers, he is brought back under guard to his barrack, which he does not leave until the factory whistle indicates the changing of the shift.

The German Government enjoys a considerable profit from having its war prisoners work. For each prisoner so engaged, the employer turns over to the State the same wages that would be paid to a German worker. The State, through the intermediary of the prisoner's camp, allots each prisoner a wage which in general does not exceed 4.50 marks per week. This rate, however, is far less than salaries in the factories, especially that paid to skilled workmen, who receive overtime for night work.

But even these wages are practically useless to the prisoners since there are few things that can freely be bought in Germany. As long as beer was not rationed and could be bought in the canteens, the men could occasionally afford the luxury of buying a bottle. But today this luxury has become impossible. They are still able to buy razor-blades, pencils, and matches, but there is no tobacco to be had. In short, the money they earn, little as it is, has no value for them.

However, the prisoners are allowed to send up to twenty marks a month to their families in France. This is a particularly touching gesture on the part of the Nazi authorities, whom harsh necessity compels to keep hundreds of thousands of breadwinners separated from their families; thanks to their generosity, the men can at least send their families pocket-money. But the French Government pays this pocket-money at the rate of twenty francs per mark imposed

by the occupying power ; the entire sum is deducted from the several hundred million francs a day that France pays as her share of the occupation costs of the German Army.

In general, the Kommandos that involve the least hardship for the prisoners of war are those which offer farm work. But the percentage of French prisoners doing this kind of labour is getting smaller and smaller ; the Germans have shown a marked tendency to put Frenchmen in factories and replace them on farms with prisoners from Eastern Europe.

If the men, in so far as they are given a choice, prefer to do agricultural labour, it is certainly not because the work is less heavy than elsewhere. During the good season, the working day lasts from sunrise to sundown. The absence of farmers and labourers able to bear arms, the poverty of the soil in many regions, the lack of petrol, necessitating a reversion to archaic methods further aggravated by the requisitioning of horses — all these factors contribute to making an already difficult job far more painful. To this must be added the way of life of the German peasant, which is so completely different from that of the French rural population. The characteristic that makes the deepest impression on the French prisoners is neatly summed up in the following description, which constantly appears in every discussion of their experiences : “ These people haven’t the remotest idea of what to get out of life ; they work and slave all day like niggers, and that’s the only thing they know. They don’t even take time off to eat ; they never take any rest or any joy in life. They’re like ants.”

Yet the relations between the prisoners and the rural population, at least on the small and medium-sized farms, are almost always good, and sometimes even friendly. This is not quite true on the vast estates in east Germany, with their semi-feudal regime, their Prussian squires, and their numerous tenants, who traditionally live under conditions bordering on medieval serfdom. But throughout the west and south of the country, the familiarity engendered by dwelling under the same roof and the nature of the work itself has in numerous cases succeeded in lightening the burden

of captivity to such an extent that the Nazi authorities have decreed a new ruling, to the effect that in the future no prisoners will be allowed to live in the house of the farmer for whom they are working. Every evening a patrol rounds up all the Frenchmen working in the district and locks them up for the night in a carefully guarded barn. In order to forestall any attempts to escape, which became more frequent after the introduction of the new system, the guards are instructed to confiscate all prisoners' trousers and shoes for the night. Fortunately this order is not carried out very strictly, for the German soldiers themselves, mostly well on in years, lose much of their rigid discipline in this rural setting where they are far from their superiors, get plenty of food, and, moreover, acquire a taste for leisure.

Accordingly, they keep on fairly good terms with their prisoners. They carry on a number of small transactions with those who have access to the farmyard, the stables, and the farm in general; a few gifts lead to friendship. But the main reason the soldiers are interested in a peaceful existence without incidents is so that they can hang on to their sinecure, for in war-time there are many more disagreeable jobs than that of standing guard over an agricultural Kommando. Therefore they do their very best to smooth out the inevitable difficulties between prisoners and farmers, which might very well draw down on the Kommando the attention of the camp.

In this desire to remain on good terms with their charges, not all of the guards go to the extreme that one of them did. This guard, a poacher in peace-time, used to go deer-hunting with two of his prisoners, whom he even allowed to carry guns. Such leniency turned out to be costly — the soldier was denounced by a peasant who had not received his stipulated share of venison, and received a sentence of ten years in prison, the two prisoners getting three and five years respectively.

Even the work in factories is not the real bogey of the men. It is the work on automobile highways, railroads, and military construction — aerodromes, fortifications, Army camps — that the men really loathe. 'Twelve hours' work a

day, in numerous shifts, no matter what the temperature, no matter what the weather may be. Many parts of Germany have an extremely cold winter, with heavy snowfall; during the unusually hard winter of 1940-41 the work in these districts was not interrupted for a single day.

Here is an example. At Kommando No. — at —, in the eastern part of Germany, the work consists of constructing an Army camp, building a highway, and digging fortifications. There are eight hundred French prisoners crowded into a few tiny huts that cannot be heated, with the temperature often down to 30 below. The nearest railway station is twelve miles away; no towns or civilians are anywhere in the vicinity. But right next door to the prisoners' camp, with only a barbed-wire fence between, is a soldiers' camp, where combined artillery and infantry manoeuvres are constantly carried out. At all times of day and night, shells — real ones — fly over the prisoners' huts and burst only a short distance away from the barbed wire. Three men who escaped one night had to crawl for almost half a mile with shells whizzing over them before they finally emerged from the danger zone.

The work, for twelve hours each day, involves digging up ground, often under a heavy snow, and in many places on a stony or even rocky terrain. The men have to march four to six kilometres before arriving at the various locations. They are under S.S. guards. The work is urgent, and the men are pushed to the limit.

In the morning the men receive less than half a pint of some darkish liquid, and about nine ounces of bread which must last them for the whole day. At midday they are given a soup made of fish powder or soya beans. In the evening they receive three or four potatoes and a black pudding into which no meat has ever been known to stray, or else a portion of the same soup they had at noon.

Of these eight hundred men, about two hundred bear certificates from the chief surgeon of their base camp exempting them from heavy work or even advising their repatriation. This, however, did not prevent the slaver

from rounding them up and sending them off; they are obliged to work as hard as anyone else.

Medical facilities are of the scantiest. There is a French assistant doctor and a hospital barrack, similar to the others, with eighteen beds. Not more than twenty-five men are permitted by the camp commander to show up at the morning inspection. The doctor is strictly forbidden to grant work exemptions to more than ten men for any one day. Oberleutnant M——, head of the camp, personally attends these inspections, and it is he who decides whether or not a man is sick.

Five deaths occurred within three months. When the men were relieved and brought back to the base camp, the German chief surgeon there officially recognized three hundred men as "gravely sick", sent a hundred of them to the hospital, and had fifty others repatriated.

The mails are irregular and capricious. The letters, which have already passed through the camp censorship, are again censored at the Kommando by the Oberleutnant. Outgoing letters, before being sent to the camp for the regular censorship, must be submitted to a preliminary scrutiny by the Kommando chief, who reserves the right to hold back an indefinite number and even to punish the men for sentences or allusions that displease him. The parcels, which have also been gone through at the camp, are thoroughly examined by the lieutenant. His favourite sport consists of confiscating the paper bags and spilling their contents into a single mess-tin, thus making a ghastly mess of sugar, rice, coffee, and flour. Contrary to the Geneva Convention, the packages sent by the French Red Cross are not given directly to the men but handed over to the camp kitchen, where the larger part of their contents disappears. If the Red Cross sends biscuits, the quantity received by the men is deducted from their bread ration.

That is a true picture of the closed Kommandos, those which, isolated from the rest of the world, depend completely on the arbitrary and uncontrolled authority of whoever may be in command. Of course, they are not all quite so terrible;

the character of the officer in charge of the Kommando has a lot to do with the treatment the men are subjected to. The international Red Cross, of course, ignores the Kommandos. It recognizes only the official camps, the camps in which remain only a very small percentage of the prisoners, perhaps 10 per cent, or 15 at the most. The rest of the men do not come under its "supervision", and for a good reason.

The industrial Kommandos have become more and more numerous, for French man-power is too skilled to be wasted on jobs that can be performed by prisoners from less industrialized countries. Today there are French prisoners employed in every branch of German industry, a considerable proportion of whom are even in war industries. There are some factories in which they number as high as or more than a third of the employees, as for instance a former locomotive factory in Bavaria which today produces tanks, and where, out of three thousand workers, one thousand are French, about five hundred Italian, another five hundred Belgian and Dutch "voluntary civilian workers", and several hundred German women. A relatively small number of men are German workers.

The working conditions are the same for the prisoners as for the other workers : ten to twelve hours a day. Usually the men are thrown in with the civilian workers, but occasionally there are factories that have created workshops for prisoners alone. Work over, the men are taken under escort to huts near the factories, or else to a kind of barracks, and there they remain until the next morning. Although living right in the midst of a city, they are completely cut off from it ; the schedule they are obliged to follow during their "free" hours varies only in one respect from that observed in camp : they have almost no place to walk. Sometimes, in rare cases, there is a space outside the barrack surrounded by barbed wire, or perhaps a yard behind the barrack, closed in by walls, where they are allowed to get some "air". The life they lead is that of convicts.

But nevertheless there is a difference, and a very important difference : during their work hours they come in contact with civilians. And the very nature of their work does not permit the Nazi authorities to prevent this contact from being extended and even from becoming quite friendly.

The majority of German workers who remain in the factories belong to a very special category : they are older men, men too old either to have been very deeply contaminated by Nazi ideology or to bear arms. Moreover, their special technical qualities, by making them indispensable to the war economy, allow them a measure of free expression and give them a kind of nonchalance, further augmented by the fact that they feel secure among themselves in their workshops, among men with whom, in general, they have been working for years, sometimes for decades. Most of these workers knew each other at a time when they were still unionized, when they still belonged to leftist parties. They are fully aware of those among them who have become suspect, those who must be watched — but why bother to hide their thoughts from the others, and especially from the prisoners ? The presence of that class of workers, with its bearing on production, is what gives the industrial Kommandos their appeal.

In many factories a real " collaboration " has grown up between the German workers and the French prisoners, a collaboration, however, which is far removed in spirit from that which exists between Berlin and Vichy. Tacit or open agreements have been entered into not to exceed a certain speed of work. This is a fact which prisoners returning from German factories have been unanimous in emphasizing, that among the older German workers, particularly in the metallurgical plants, there is a very manifest tendency to slow up the rhythm of production. It is only secondarily caused by a frank opposition to the regime ; its principal aim is a fight against the lowering of wages, against the decrease in rates for piece-work. And this lack of zeal is not only obvious but involves a real drop in production ; every prisoner familiar with the trade can easily see that the

output of this type of German worker is vastly below that which had been the general rule during peace-time in similar factories of French industry.

The Nazis at first hesitated to send war prisoners into factories. That they were finally forced to do so was because the labour shortage became more demanding than their fears about the possible consequences of such a move. At this present date it is not too far-fetched to say that the time is not too far off when they will regret this move. There are French prisoners working in factories of the Ruhr. There are others working in the ports. There are still more employed in the public utilities of large cities, in street sanitation services. During winter, the prisoners are the ones who remove the snow and clear the roads and highways. Then, too, in the districts subjected to frequent air raids, there are gangs of prisoners who clear away the ruins and are detailed to build air-raid shelters.

A large group of men trained in this kind of work, belonging in peace-time to the various branches of construction work, is stationed at Essen, in the Ruhr. These men have their quarters in a small converted theatre. During air raids they are shut in this building, which has neither cellars nor floors between the roof and the street floor which they are on. The shelters they dig for the Germans cannot be used by these prisoners. The reason for this is that German propaganda must have French victims, so that it can point out that French prisoners of war are being killed by English bombs.

As a matter of fact, this is a general practice. The prisoners are not allowed access to underground shelters in the factories where they work. During raids they remain either in the open or in their huts. In addition, during raids the base camps are subjected to a complete black-out, which is entirely contrary to international convention. Instead, Army camps or other military objectives in the vicinity are brightly lit up in order to deceive the raiders, who will try to avoid bombing what they believe to be a prisoners' camp. On various occasions there have been deaths among the

prisoners as a result of aerial bombardments which the Germans have succeeded in diverting to their camps by means of such ruses. The men are well aware of who is to blame, and the casualties that occur in this manner are added to the already long list of French prisoners who have become victims of the Nazis.

According to recent statistics, at least 90 per cent of the French prisoners in Germany belong to *Arbeitskommandos*. They are scattered all over the country, working on public highways, along railway tracks, and in factories. In addition are millions of other prisoners — Poles, Yugoslavs, Belgians, Dutch, and Russians — and more millions of “voluntary civilian workers” coming from all parts of subjugated Europe. These men often work beside Germans who have little enthusiasm for the regime, and even beside German political prisoners.

Some day their *Arbeitskommandos* will be transformed into commandos of a different type, commandos like those who landed at Saint-Nazaire, at Boulogne, at Dieppe, and at Brest. And only in a very limited sense will the work of these commandos continue that of the *Arbeitskommandos*.

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XIV

Camp Doctors

"BARRACK 7: DUMOULINS, ALIX, LIONEL, MOREAU, OVER here, along the wall. Barrack 8, come on, get some order into it; line up over there."

The hospital orderly, nicknamed the "gendarme", was lining the men up for the morning inspection. As usual, he was the centre of a milling throng of men who had a thousand and one requests to make. This inspection was held by three of the five French Army doctors in camp. Naturally there were "good" and "bad" ones among them. The personality and temper of the Army doctors were a primary object of interest in the corridor where the men waited; every man would resort to all sorts of tricks in order to be examined by the doctor of his choice and, in particular, not to be examined by the terrible head doctor, Captain L. The success or failure of these wiles depended on the "gendarme", who, as custodian of the visiting charts for the various barracks, handed them over to whatever doctors were free at the time.

"Look here, gendarme, I'm in Barrack 9. Be a good chap, and try to give our chart to Fargeaud."

"What d'you want me to do? Everyone wants to be examined by him. Can't be done; I'll have to give the chart to whoever's free."

"All you have to do is to skip our barrack and wait till Fargeaud's free."

"Listen, go away, will you! Stop bothering me; you're the sixth this morning. D'you think Fargeaud is any better than the others? They're all the same. Fargeaud just has a smoother patter, that's all. Even if he wanted to, he couldn't do any more than the others."

The consulting-room is small; about twelve by fifteen feet. Three French doctors are there, each seated at a small

table. Several orderlies, also prisoners, are present. In front of each table several men form a line.

"Barrack 11. Malvoisin, step forward. Well, what's the matter with you?" Lieutenant Paoli doesn't even look up. He has a pencil in his hand and a small white pad before him. The consultation is brief, the examination even briefer, while the treatment the man will receive won't be lavish. It can hardly be otherwise, with only three doctors for seven hundred men each morning and with the facilities allowed by the Germans.

Malvoisin, an awkward peasant from a tiny hamlet hidden in the Massif Central, begins laboriously to recount the various symptoms of his illness to Lieutenant Paoli. He has had vomiting attacks for days, he can't eat or sleep, he has a pain here and a pain there. . . .

"Dispensary, over there." Paoli has not once looked up. Even before having heard the man's story, he had scribbled something on the pad, an order for the dispensary. "Next, please."

In the dispensary, Malvoisin will be given an aspirin tablet. The next man, with a complaint about his liver, will receive a little bicarbonate of soda, while the third will probably be cauterized for no good reason. For the resources of the dispensary are limited, and the powers of the French doctors, harassed by the hundreds of men showing up every morning, are even more so.

Out of the seven hundred sick men that morning, few will manage to obtain an exemption from work; and not more than about ten will be lucky enough to get an order admitting them to the infirmary, for room is scarce and the Germans are very strict in tracking down malingerers.

The severity of the system regulating the health of the camp is not so much due to the German Army doctors, to whom the French doctors are subordinated, as to the rulings put out by the Labour Ministry. Before the case-papers annotated by the French doctors are returned to the barracks, they are subjected to a thorough examination by the infirmary office. The number of exemptions from work

allowed by the French officers is carefully noted, and, when it seems excessive, the "guilty" doctor is reprimanded. But, apart from this, the notation on the case-paper which excuses a man from work is no protection against the stray impulses of various slavers. When one of these recruiting agents has designs on a man, there is no way the latter can escape being sent to a Kommando, for, if he refers to the diagnosis on his chart, he will be told that the signature of the French doctor is valueless and that, unless he can immediately produce a certificate signed by one of the German Army doctors, he will be included in a work party no matter what the state of his health may be. And German doctors' certificates are not within everyone's reach.

When a man manages to be examined by a German doctor and to be put on the sick list, he gets a certificate that inspires confidence. Often this certificate is the outcome of much effort. It may be the first stage of a difficult passage through the ramifications of medical procedure. It's an absolute lottery ticket with tremendous possibilities. Its mere possession, whatever the illness written on it, assures the holder of relative well-being. Here is an English translation of the form :

CERTIFICATE OF SICKNESS

Doctor of Camp.....	
Prisoner of war No.....	Name.....
Diagnosis	
Confined to infirmary.....	
To receive treatment until.....	
Fit for work after	
Can only work under certain conditions*	
.....	
.....	
Date	Doctor's signature

* For instance : no outdoor labour ; not to be exposed to dampness ; not to handle pick and shovel ; not to carry heavy weights ; etc.

The minimum guaranteed by this certificate is a short

respite, the certainty of receiving treatment until a fixed date. The next degree of blessedness is admission to the infirmary for a few days. But to get in, and above all to stay in for longer than three days, a man must be really seriously ill and, what is more, able to defend his position against suspicious check-ups by the doctors, continually haunted by the thought of malingerers. A man may be so sick that he can do no work, but only if he is also extremely resourceful, energetic, and tenacious and can put these qualities to use, does he have the slightest chance of getting a certificate exempting him from certain jobs. But even then he need be under no illusions, for he will still have work to do. The system for making use of man-power is applied with such infinite care as to squeeze everything possible out of it, so that the prisoner will be contributing to the German war effort even if he has a couple of fingers missing, even if he can only work sitting down, even if he can hardly walk. For there are Kommandos, workshops, and special tasks for those who "can only work under certain conditions".

There is, of course, the grand prize of all: repatriation for serious illness. But this is very rare. In the course of a year, perhaps 1000 men out of 125,000 managed to obtain the certificate that bears, alongside the diagnosis, in gothic characters carefully traced by the secretary of the infirmary, the word *Entlassung* (liberation).

There is a hitch, however. The certificate alone is not a guarantee of freedom. If a man is Jewish, the Gestapo will strike him off the list of men to be sent home, whether he is at death's door, has an arm or leg amputated, is tubercular, or has a serious cardiac condition. If his political views are suspect; if he is opposed to "collaboration", or likely to disseminate anti-German propaganda, or a Gaullist; if he has been caught trying to escape or has ever paid a visit to Barrack 60 — then he's done for and may as well reserve himself a plot in a corner of the little cemetery in the near-by village, where the graves are spreading out with the relentless momentum of a flow of lava. The Gestapo will never let him go.

"German doctors?" said a French chief surgeon, head of a prisoners' hospital, whose position confers a certain amount of independence both physical and mental, and whose work puts him in contact with a great many of his German "colleagues". "German doctors? It's quite simple. In the case of men who reached a mature age before the advent of Nazism, they are generally not only good doctors but men with a strong professional conscience who take pains to give their patients the best possible treatment, whether they are prisoners or not. But the young ones, and especially those who studied under the new regime, are another story. Their professional skill is so poor, their medical science so limited, and, with all that, their arrogance so great, that on several occasions I have had to make complaints about several of them to the Health Administration for prisoners' camps in the War Ministry. And the facts I reported were so completely inexcusable that I, a prisoner, was in some cases upheld against the German Army doctors."

Colonel Kluge, head of the medical staff in camp, belonged to the old school, for he was a man of about sixty-five. A mere cog in the gigantic German war machine, Colonel Kluge nevertheless, whenever possible, exerted his influence in an effort to make things easier for the prisoners. In the cases that came before him, he gave proof of high professional ethics and even of kindness. On occasion he could demonstrate a civic courage that was rare in Germany; for in various instances he did his best to uphold, even against the Gestapo representative, his decision to repatriate a sick man whether Jewish or not. It is useless to add that Colonel Kluge, chief medical officer though he was, did not succeed in these cases. Like everyone else in camp, the Colonel was powerless and without influence when faced with the opposition of either the political police or the Labour Ministry.

Of all the German officers in camp, he was the only one whom the prisoners credited with having humanitarian instincts. He came from the south of Germany, from a region where certain liberal traditions exist. Tall and stooping, he had the high-domed head of a scholar. He

spoke French, but not because he had learned it for espionage purposes ; once, many years before, he had spent a few years in Paris studying.

Yet, in spite of his attitude, there was little he could do. He had his orders ; and, though he executed them with bad grace, he still executed them. He often had strange tasks to perform.

One day the camp witnessed an unusual and significant spectacle. A convoy of Polish women, deported as a reprisal measure, stopped a few days for a medical inspection before going on to an unknown destination.

They arrived in a pitiful state, almost dead with fear, surrounded by S.S. men and self-styled nurses belonging to the female branch of this corps. There were three hundred of them, picked at random in a small Polish town one Easter Sunday as the crowds were coming out of church. They were taken off without being allowed to say good-bye to their families or take anything but the Sunday finery they had put on for church. They were so bedraggled with dust and exhausted by their long journey in box cars that it was difficult to tell them apart, to make out that among them were peasants, shopkeepers, and women of the leisured class. There were girls of twelve and women over sixty, all equally miserable, all reduced to the same condition. They spent a day in a barrack near the camp gate, closely guarded by their escort. The French prisoners were not allowed to come near them, but learned their story from the medical personnel.

Colonel Kluge was charged with the medical inspection and vaccination of these women. The commanding officer of the S.S. troops had told him that they were Polish women who had volunteered to work in Germany. The French staff of the infirmary had joined the German doctors in examining the women. From the very beginning, when the first of them entered the examining-room, the Colonel was struck with their appearance, so much so that he finally asked one of them whether they had really volunteered. The woman, wife of a high Government official, burst into tears, and he was unable to get a word out of her. It was

only little by little, through scraps of information that he could get out of a few of the "volunteers", that the Colonel learned the truth.

At first he was utterly bowled over, too amazed to say anything. Then suddenly he exploded, in the presence of the French doctors and the Polish women. "*Schweinerei!*" he roared. "It's an outrage, an infamy! So that is what they call bringing culture to the occupied countries!"

He broke off as abruptly as he had begun, rose, asked the French doctors to carry on the examination without him, and stalked out. He went to see the colonel in command of the camp, and did not return for two hours. No one ever knew what happened.

The French doctors asked his permission to organize a collection of food among the prisoners for the starving women. The Colonel told them to go ahead but with discretion so as not to attract the attention of the Gestapo, and volunteered himself to carry the gifts to the women's barrack in order to get them by the S.S. guards.

The women went off the next morning. Before their departure, Colonel Kluge, accompanied by Captain L—— of the French medical corps, brought them the boxes of provisions in his car. The night before he had kept them in his office to evade the guard.

"The old man has a swell job! We French doctors have our hands tied about the men; he lets us play the part of executioner. Just look how many poor devils we've had to put out when we knew perfectly well they were sick, just because he doesn't let us have the means to take care of them or because he doesn't support us against the Labour Ministry! But when he finds someone who's had the nerve and endurance to get through to him, if he discovers the least thing wrong with him, he'll treat him like a prince. And naturally that helps to demoralize the men because they get the impression that the French doctors treat them worse than the *boches* themselves."

There was a lot of truth in what Captain L—— was

saying. Sometimes men who had not been recognized as sick by the French doctors managed to get in on the Colonel's examination without passing through the usual routine, that is, the complex weeding-out process by their own medical officers ; when this happened, they usually found the Colonel more sympathetic than the French doctors. But the Colonel saw only a limited number of cases. He was less harried than the French officers, less nervous, and, above all, he was the boss. He could afford an attack of benevolence from time to time.

And then there was something else. A prisoner himself, the French doctor was generally more suspicious of his patients than when he had actually been in charge of his unit's health. He knew that a single man's repatriation for heart trouble, if it became known to the camp, would the very next day bring down upon him a hundred " patients " all suffering from the same thing. He knew that no matter what disease had caused the release of a prisoner it would become an epidemic on the morrow. Perhaps he was also aware that this stream of new patients not only included malingerers but was in large part composed of men who were really affected by the disease they complained of but who, up till then, had been doubtful not only of " getting something out of it " but even of being given adequate treatment.

But there were too many of them ; there were too many sick men altogether. Too many for the Labour Ministry, which, if it could, would have liked nothing better than to call off even the medical inspections ; for, in spite of every precaution, these inspections were responsible for a daily loss of several working hours. There were too many for the French doctors, for whom it was physically impossible to give even a superficial examination to every man who turned up.

Red Cross Conventions provide that prisoners of war must be given medical care by their own medical units. The Germans respect the letter of the Geneva Convention, but they do so with the sole aim of violating its spirit. By entrusting the medical care of the prisoners to their own

doctors and orderlies and at the same time denying the latter the indispensable means to fulfil their task, they make a mockery of the conventions. And in this way they also attain a twofold objective that is absolutely contrary to the principles that inspired the Red Cross agreements: first, taking advantage of the fact that the French medical personnel is necessary to the health of the men, they disregard, in a time of armistice, the obligations imposed by the Convention to repatriate any surplus medical personnel, which applies even during hostilities, and for very good reasons; and second, something even more serious, their system tends to discredit the French doctors and their orderlies in the eyes of their own men.

"Recht ist, was dem deutschen Volke nützt" (Right consists in what is useful to the German people)—this Nazi definition is in Germany applied to Red Cross Conventions. And it is through this rule that the medical services in the prisoners' camps come under the control of both the Labour Ministry and the Gestapo.

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XV

Escape

THE TRAVELLER WHO CROSSES GERMANY TODAY IS STRUCK BY the tremendous number of war prisoners he meets everywhere. Prisoners along the railways, working in shifts that often contain several hundred men, changing the rails or repairing the tracks ; prisoners, isolated or in groups, in the fields, in villages, or in forests ; prisoners in the cities, cleaning streets or employed in public works ; everywhere prisoners, wearing the uniforms of all the armies of Europe.

There is no section of life in Germany that does not bear the mark of this countless enslaved horde of foreign labour. Then there are the millions of civilian "volunteers" imported by Germany from every corner of the Continent. When, besides these, one considers that a great many officers and soldiers of vassal armies are running around in various uniforms, it is not hard to see that the average German civilian and even the plain policeman have a hard time telling at first glance whether a stranger clad in an unusual uniform is an enemy prisoner, a gallant member of a corps of foreign workers chosen by his Government to assist the German war effort, or an officer of some unknown but allied army.

All these circumstances often lead to some astonishing incidents, such as the case of a prisoner wearing the colourful uniform of a sergeant in the customs guards, who was able to wander through a large city for a whole day with the utmost freedom. He had been sent under escort to a hospital in the city. But the two soldiers who had taken him were told that the hospital was full and decided that right then and there was the time to take a few hours off before returning to the Stalag. Knowing that their protégé could be trusted, as he was the father of a large family in the Occupied zone and would not try to give them the slip, they provided him with

ration slips and a few marks, and told him to be at the station at eight that evening. The prisoner thus on parole dutifully went for a long walk through the city and toward evening calmly took a table in a very popular restaurant. He hung his képi up beside the caps of German officers and ordered a meal, which was served to him with a great deal of deference.

"I'm sure they took me for an Italian general because of the red stripe on my trousers," he used to say when telling about his adventure.

How can even the formidable police organization of the Third Reich cope with the supervision of millions of foreigners circulating through the country? Who is to know whether the French soldier walking along a road between two villages belongs to a near-by Kommando or whether he is escaping? The German population has lost a great deal of its curiosity on this subject. The zeal once shown in aiding the authorities to watch the prisoners now leaves more and more to be desired. Hostility is rare, and indifference is the general rule; often, however, this goes as far as complicity. Not for nothing do the German papers frequently publish lists of extremely severe punishments inflicted on civilians who are found guilty of having had amicable relations with prisoners. Nor is it without significance that in every town hall, every station, every village bar the traveller will find a poster in black letters on blood-red paper reminding the civilian population that a prisoner, "though entitled to be treated without brutality", is not a part of the "German community" and that no German "has the right to forget that he has borne arms against Germany and probably has his hands stained with German blood". The chief danger to the escaped prisoner does not lie in the civilian population. But his task is only slightly lightened by this fact. For the road to the frontier is a long one, and the traps to avoid are numberless.

These traps become more frequent as he approaches the frontier. A soldier who had started out from a camp in central Germany and been recaptured only a few yards from the boundary line between Austria and Switzerland, said that in

the prison at Feldkirch, where he had been held while waiting for a convoy to take him back to camp, he had seen about six hundred French prisoners, a number of whom had come great distances before getting caught within sight of freedom. Some had come all the way from East Prussia, from a camp situated over six hundred miles as the crow flies from where they were captured. Two boys from a school for soldiers' sons, aged fifteen and sixteen, who were also prisoners of war because their school had not moved back quickly enough, had ridden the rails on an express from Berlin. Others had come from camps near Hamburg, from various Kommandos scattered all through the country. The majority, however, had escaped from camps in southern Germany and Austria.

Today only the Swiss frontier remains for prisoners trying to escape. As a matter of fact, even before the defeat of the French Army, Germany had become dominant over nearly all her neighbours, so that French soldiers never did have much of a choice. The Russian frontier was always very difficult to reach, even for prisoners escaping from camps in East Prussia. But there was the Yugoslav border, which was within easy reach and over which hundreds of prisoners passed every month, sure of a royal welcome on the other side of the barrier. And there was also Hungary, which, in spite of her adherence to the "New Order", for a long time chose to keep her eyes closed to the passage of escaped French prisoners across her territory.

Now all that is finished. Only the Swiss border is left, and Switzerland has become a paradise for the French prisoner of war. For this border is heavily guarded. The Germans realize that it is impossible for them to keep an effective watch along the whole length of it, so they have neglected nothing to make it impassable by other devices. Nevertheless there are men who manage to cross it every day.

On the best method of escape, experiment and endless heated discussions have given rise to two main schools of thought besides, of course, numerous sub-schools. According to one, the point of departure should be the camp, while

the other insists just as strongly that the Kommando should be the spring-board.

The obvious advantage of escaping from a Kommando, so long as it is one in the country, lies in the fact that it is easier to fool the guard. But on the other hand the alarm is given much sooner than in camp. Furthermore, a small group of men isolated in an unfamiliar countryside does not offer the means for material assistance that are to be found in the camp, such as the necessary maps and the oral advice without which the maps have only a limited value, not to mention adequate civilian clothes, provisions, and money, all of which are highly indispensable to a successful escape. And there is no question of smuggling these things out of camp to the Kommando, for every man must undergo a thorough search before leaving in a work party.

The prisoner who escapes while working in the open country must go in his uniform and therefore cannot travel by train. He must walk the whole way to the frontier, travelling by night and sleeping by day; he must shun villages, bridges, and all places of strategic interest; he must keep an eye out for policemen, forest rangers, and especially their dogs. He may be on the road for months and months. And, if he observes all these precautions, he will rarely be caught — at least not before his arrival in the border zone, where success or failure depends largely on luck.

But the connoisseur of more subtle solutions, if circumstances allow him to choose, will elect to escape from camp, scorning the boy-scout existence of his comrade, the Kommando refugee. Instead of letting his feet do the work, he will rely on his little grey cells to carry him over the few hundred yards that separate the interior of the camp from a seat in a second-class compartment of the train that will whisk him to within a mile or two of the frontier. And in many instances these few hundred yards will require a more strenuous effort than it takes the two feet of an infantryman to transport their master several hundred miles. For it is no easy matter to leave the camp.

A lot of careful preparation and perfect execution are

needed to get away with the trick used by two prisoners who, impeccably clad from top to toe in the latest Berlin fashion in civilian clothes, walked calmly through the main gate of the camp, making a very favourable impression on the sentry with a faultless Nazi salute punctuated by a nonchalant "Heil Hitler!" This met with the success it deserved, which was not the case with sixteen Polish soldiers who were caught in the act of slipping through a hole that had been cut in the barbed wire one stormy night. But the former exploit was a real master-stroke of genius, repetition of which was made difficult by the introduction of a more rigorous system of identification at the camp exit. Possibly on a par was the exploit of five men who, after having bribed an Austrian soldier, an old soldier of fortune with ten years in the Foreign Legion behind him, persuaded him to lead them over the frontier on "Kommando" duty, with the help of a forged order.

Thus there are numerous stratagems that cannot be worked more than once, such as that of the French interpreter at the Kommandantur. Under the eyes of the disciplinary officer, whose presence lent added weight to the fictitious order, he requisitioned two armed soldiers and an Army truck to transport him and twelve other prisoners to a neighbouring village, where, under pretence of having to pick up a load for the camp, he and his companions disappeared into a house with a back exit. But there are others that will always be good, repeated each time with new variations, adapted to the circumstances and necessities of the hour. For the most rigid watch, the most skilfully thought-out regulations, and the most detailed orders cannot completely control a camp subject to such fluctuations in the number of men as are dictated by Germany's need for slave labour.

Obviously there is more to it than just getting out of camp. The man who wants to travel by train must know the time-table, the connections, the lay-out of the different stations — all the things that seem so simple to the normal traveller and become so terribly complicated when the

traveller is an escaped prisoner who knows neither the language nor the customs of the country, who must avoid asking questions that may give him away, and who must at all times be careful not to attract attention. There were some who, after an uneventful trip, were recaptured because, unable to find the station exit and not daring to ask their fellow passengers, they wandered around the platforms until they aroused the suspicions of the police. Others have given themselves away by asking unusual questions in a foreign accent, or else by not being able to understand harmless questions innocently asked by other passengers. If a man seated next to an old and very loquacious Austrian lady attempts, somewhat lamely because of his unfamiliarity with the language, to make his education rise to the occasion, he will in all probability draw upon him the attention of the fanatical Nazi seated opposite him. If he wishes to avoid such a painful outcome, there is but one method at his disposal, a brilliant masterpiece invented by a prisoner who, after devoting a great deal of brain-work to this problem, managed to arrive in Switzerland with his linguistic baggage consisting of a single sentence. This sentence, the pronunciation of which he had studied for weeks and which he had learned to enunciate with all the arrogance of a Prussian official, denotes an inspired knowledge of the world and of things German on the part of the inventor. It is a veritable handbook on how to avoid any embarrassment. For what loquacious old lady will persist in her well-meaning attempts to strike up a conversation when her chosen victim, solidly entrenched behind a forbidding copy of the *Voelkischer Beobachter*, replies in a haughty and arrogant tone: "*Lassen Sie mich in Ruhe !*" ("Leave me in peace !")

The prisoner who will follow this example, if he has learned all the other lessons taught by experience ; if he is properly dressed and has not forgotten that Army boots can completely destroy the effect of the very best civilian outfit ; if he knows that in Munich he must change trains and that the train for the Liechtenstein frontier leaves from another station ; if he does not confuse the train conductor with a

policeman who may be looking for him ; if he confines himself to showing him his ticket instead of abandoning all hope and giving himself up to the poor man, who will not know what else to do but turn him over to the police at the next station ; if he has made every preparation for the trip ; if he shows a great deal of courage and limitless nerve ; and, above all, if he has plenty of luck — then he is sure to have a more or less comfortable ride to the station where he must get off to avoid the passport examination. And, even if he does not know the frontier section as well as the two sportsmen who, long before the war, had spent numerous vacations there for winter sports and who easily succeeded in crossing the frontier one New Year's night, thanks to the traditional German custom of getting drunk, his chances for a successful crossing will be fair enough. That is, they will be fair enough provided the mobile frontier posts have not changed their locations since the last escape in that sector, and provided he is not discovered by a forest ranger's dogs or does not get lost in the snow to be found unconscious and frozen by the frontier guards. If any of these calamities should happen, instead of the freedom so close, it will be the disciplinary camp — until the next attempt.

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XVI

Disciplinary Barrack

THERE IS ONE BARRACK IN THE CAMP THAT TERRIFIES EVERYONE. This is the barrack for escaped prisoners. Here are confined the men who, after a more or less extended trip through Germany, were finally run down and brought back to camp, there to await a decision on their fate. Barrack 60 is not the last stop for them. It is only a station on the road to something worse.

This barrack is well within the Stalag grounds ; but to get in touch with its inmates is a process that demands so much effort, requires so many wiles, and involves so much danger that even if it were a hundred miles away the task could be no more difficult. It is entirely surrounded by a tremendous amount of barbed wire and an equal amount of mystery. Yet this has not always been so.

During the first few months it had been like the other barracks, except that it was reserved for men condemned to light prison sentences for having tried to escape. While awaiting their turn in the constantly crowded prison of the neighbouring county seat, the guests of Barrack 60 received the same treatment as everyone else. They were allowed to associate with prisoners in other barracks, and their freedom of movement within the camp was in no way restricted more than that of all the other prisoners of war.

In fact, at that time an unsuccessful escape was not too costly. Once caught and brought back, a prisoner appeared before a military court ; this was composed of officers who did not regard an attempted escape by a prisoner of war as a criminal offence but as an entirely comprehensible act, and they generally passed out the minimum sentence, which varied from two to three weeks in prison. This sentence was taken rather as a joke ; the men waiting in Barrack 60 to be

transferred to prison were never very much concerned and had no reason to be.

The prison itself had a good reputation in camp. For the man sent there was sure to find, for the first time since the start of the war, a room of his own. "Room" is perhaps an exaggeration, but to a man who has not had a single moment of privacy since the beginning of the war, a cell where he can be alone, even in a German prison, seems like a dream come true. And then, too, there was the food. As the tiny prison at the county seat did not contain any political offenders but only those condemned for civil crimes, the food was such as to seem abundant to the French prisoners. It was a paradox that the prisoner serving a sentence for attempted escape received a larger bread ration and better soup than his "innocent" comrades.

When the sentence had been served, the man returned to camp and resumed his "normal existence". Naturally his one thought was to try again. It was extremely rare that a prisoner who had once made the attempt and tasted freedom for a few days before being caught did not seek the means "to do better next time".

In theory, a second escape was made more difficult by a rule forbidding recaptured prisoners to be sent on Kommando. But in actual practice this ruling was not very effective; a man might have friends with access to the files of the Labour Ministry, and there was always the voracious appetite of the latter, which was usually inclined to accept voluntary workers without inquiring too closely into their record. As a general rule, a prisoner who had already made one escape did not remain very long in camp.

Moreover, the Kommandantur was secretly not very anxious to hang on to prisoners with an escape complex. It made no effort to have such men brought back from Kommando work, for their escape was the responsibility of the Labour Ministry rather than that of the disciplinary officer. The latter saw no harm in being relieved of the embarrassing presence of a firebrand who did nothing but contaminate his more docile comrades. Obviously a man

who has tried to escape once and who everyone knows will try again is a dangerous example for the others ; his exploits are widely talked about and act as an incentive, while his experiences are profited by. In other words, it was better to lose a man than to have him incite the whole camp.

But this attitude soon underwent a change, for the Gestapo had quite a different view of the matter. Naturally, it was no more anxious than the Kommandantur to see men who had tried to escape spread such dangerous thoughts among the others. Perhaps even better than the military office, it knew how much the other prisoners sought to contact men who had had some experience in the art of escaping. It was fully aware that a man brought back after an attempted escape automatically became a focal point of interest for those seeking advice on the best means of preparation, and that, even if he had been relieved of all his maps, he would always be able to draw others and, furthermore, could put his friends on guard against the traps he had met with in the course of his flight.

To prevent this, the Gestapo hit upon a different method than the ridiculous two-week sentences of the decrepit Army men, who were evidently unable to get away from the outmoded principles of another age. This was a very simple method which had already performed miracles in Germany's civilian life : that of preventive detention. A really brilliant plan, it would kill two birds with one stone : it would isolate the firebrands, and at the same time it would give a well-merited snub to the Army judiciary with its antiquated conceptions of justice and absurd two-week sentences.

And so the blow fell. One evening after the news broadcast, the loudspeakers throughout camp blared forth the following announcement.

" Prisoners are once more warned against any attempt to escape. It is brought to their attention that in the future any prisoner recaptured after an escape, without affecting the other penalties incurred, will thereby forfeit any chance for repatriation he might have had, regardless of the category in which he belonged.

"Heretofore, the Kommandantur has been extremely indulgent toward recaptured prisoners. The military judiciary has until now confined itself to applying the minimum penalties, in line with the chivalrous tradition of the German Army, which does not consider that a prisoner of war who escapes has committed a reprehensible act from the point of view of military honour. Nevertheless, the Kommandantur is unable to look upon the problem of escapes as unrelated to the position of France with respect to Germany. A prisoner of war who escapes while his country is still at war cannot be blamed, at least in so far as his escape is dictated by a desire to rejoin his country's army. But, since France has laid down her arms, a French prisoner who escapes today either does so for purely personal reasons or, if he flees for the purpose of taking up arms again, he is committing an act of high treason against his own country.

"In view of these considerations, the Kommandantur has decided in the future to impose upon recaptured prisoners, besides the penalty inflicted by the military court, a period of internment in a special barrack and their subsequent transfer to a disciplinary camp."

The transformation of Barrack 60 dated from this announcement.

Today it has become a veritable fortress, completely enclosed within a cage of barbed wire which stretches over the roof as well as along the sides and leaves a space of only a couple of yards in between. Armed sentries patrol outside the barrack twenty-four hours a day, while a garrison is stationed inside to maintain discipline and prevent any attempt to escape. Within the barrack itself there is not one stick of furniture; even the customary scaffolding of beds is absent. The men sleep on the ground. This is meant to teach them a lesson for having disobeyed regulations and tried to evade their duty as prisoners; it is a punishment for the crime of having preferred to return to their homes rather than work for the Germans.

Instead of being commanded by their own people, the men are in charge of a German sergeant-major with a German sergeant as his assistant, chosen among the more "energetic". The sergeant-major is a brute who goes at his job with real zest. The sergeant is "the Chinese torturer" or simply "the Chinaman", on account of his little slanting eyes, the eyes of a degenerate brute. And the rest of the barrack's garrison is on a level with the two officers.

But all this has taught the prisoners exactly nothing, at least nothing the Germans wanted to teach them. The men in Barrack 60 were rebels before they ever entered it. Whatever their origin, their personal history, their Army rank, or their character, they all had one thing in common before being united in gaol: a firm determination not to submit, to risk all for all, to face even death in an attempt to escape. The fate which they now share will finish the job of uniting them.

A prison within a prison, a gaol where convict life is carried to an extreme, a place whose purpose alone is sufficient to make its inmates conscious of the fact that they have nothing to lose so long as the Germans are on top and that they can gain nothing save through their own efforts — that is "Number 60", where real men are moulded. It makes no difference that the complement changes every three months; the men who replace those leaving for the disciplinary camp will be like them: rebels whom the Germans cannot subdue.

"Hey, look at the skirt! What in hell's she doing here?"

There was a great uproar in camp. On the main road, men were stopping to look around, amazed by what they saw. Walking toward Barrack 60 was a young girl, slender and pretty, with blond curls escaping from her beret, dressed in expensive sport clothes for mountain-climbing, with a rucksack on her back; accompanying her was a similarly clothed young man. This singular couple was flanked by

two soldiers with fixed bayonets. Bringing up the rear was the sergeant-major, throwing furious glances to right and left.

"Why, it's Thérive and Dablanc ! I tell you it's Thérive disguised as a girl ! Can't you see ? He's slender, and she's a strapping wench. Remember, they said they'd leave in a Kommando to escape ? And they've been caught ! What a bit of bad luck ! All dolled up like that and then to get picked up ! It's enough to kill your hopes !"

The verdict of the military court : Quartermaster-sergeant Thérive, Paul, 5th Battalion Alpine Chasseurs, prisoner of war number 123756, and Private Dablanc, Emile, 3rd Regiment of Zouaves, prisoner of war number 17834, for ordinary escape, three weeks in prison. Ruling by the camp administration : Transfer to Barrack 60 before and after the prison term, while awaiting internment in a disciplinary camp.

Two more customers for Barrack 60, two more for the penitentiary camp. There they will find old friends who were brought in the day before and others who have been there for months, men who were recaptured regardless of whether they were in uniform or civvies, whether their disguise was perfect or defective, whether their escape was well or badly planned, professionally or amateurishly executed. They will meet the five men who, after having walked three hundred miles and crawled the last few hundred yards of German territory, found they were in Switzerland, but who, through a slight error in calculation, having gone straight on instead of bearing left, unconsciously crossed a bend in the frontier and were recaptured. They will meet the man who, after having carried out a brilliantly conceived escape from an industrial Kommando and succeeded in reaching the station and entering the train, found himself seated opposite his 100 per cent Nazi foreman who had a particular grudge against him. They will also meet a man who has just come out of a hospital, where he spent three months with frozen hands and feet, after getting lost in the Alps ; the fellow who was with him was found frozen to death beside him,

while he himself, in spite of his ankylosed limbs, was scheduled for the disciplinary camp. And they will meet the thirty-four men who, while on a train bound for the disciplinary camp, escaped through an opening they had cut in the side of the box car, and who, without money or provisions, were able to keep the entire police of central Germany on the alert for over three weeks. Out of the forty-two who originally escaped, there are only thirty-four in Barrack 60 because six of them succeeded in reaching France while two others have just sent their friends a postcard from Malta, saying, "We are happy to be among friends again and will soon come to your help."

Thérive and Dablanc will spend two or three weeks in 60 before there is room for them in the prison, just long enough for them to get to know the others and imbibe the tradition of their new abode. While they are still in prison, the quarterly convoy for the disciplinary camp will take its departure from Barrack 60, and when they return to the barrack they will find a new batch of men. But the same old spirit will still be there, the spirit which, when the boys in 60 were ordered to unload cement, led them to drop the sacks one after the other and shatter their contents, thus ruining a whole lorryload of the stuff; the spirit that has made these men the terror of the camp administration and forced it to stop using them for "useful" work; that same spirit which, when they are led to the station to embark for the disciplinary camp, makes them march through the Stalag, not like downtrodden prisoners bewailing their fate, but like the six hundred men of the last lot marching forward in close ranks singing the Lorraine March.

XVII

A Salute to Allies

AT SIX-TWENTY THERE WASN'T ONE MAN IN THE BARRACKS. The main road was so packed with prisoners that the file of German soldiers in full marching order, going to relieve the sentries at the opposite end of camp, had a terrible time making any headway. But, as the men had gathered for a good cause — people who wish to listen to the German radio must not be discouraged — the sergeant in command of the squad decided not to use violence and ordered his men to proceed individually to the assembly point.

Ever since morning a rumour had been going the rounds that Germany was about to launch a campaign in the Balkans. German soldiers, who knew nothing definite themselves and who had probably heard the story from civilians, had let out a few vague hints to prisoners working with them in the offices of the Kommandantur. The sergeant-major in charge of the parcel-post service, known as a great windbag, but also as "not too Nazi", was reported to have told one of his French colleagues "that the real war was about to begin, and that this time it would not be a joke because the Serbs were a tough bunch". And finally the old colonel at the head of the German medical staff was supposed to have held forth rather lugubriously on the subject to the head of the French staff. All these rumours spread through the camp like wildfire, giving rise to the most contradictory assertions, that ranged all the way from one man's heated statement that "it's all a bunch of lies and we ought to beat up the rats who spread optimistic rumours on purpose so that later on we're let down", to detailed news of the bombing of Vienna and the invasion of Styria by the Yugoslav Army.

Six-twenty-five. Six-twenty-six . . . twenty-seven.
The minutes were creeping by and doing their best to

increase the men's impatience. The loudspeakers remained silent.

"Wait and see ; I bet you they won't give us any news tonight."

This had already happened on several occasions and each time had given rise to the most sensational conjectures and rumours, all, of course, extremely unfavourable to Germany, since the suppression of news could only be explained by the fact that it necessarily had to be catastrophic. Unfortunately, the real reason had usually been nothing more than negligence on the part of the official in charge of the radio in the Kommandantur police station.

Six-twenty-nine. . . . A faint buzzing came over the loudspeakers. The current had been turned on. Six-thirty. . . . The time signal. "Here is the news broadcast of the German radio. The Führer's Chancellery states that . . ." It was true !

At the very first words announcing the start of hostilities, there was such an outburst of enthusiasm that it was difficult to hear the rest, but for the moment what followed was of interest only to the pedants. Besides, it could not be anything but lies. Hadn't the radio itself said that "the Serbs" had crossed the frontier — what more could one want? For some time the camp had known about the anti-German *coup d'état* in Belgrade, the new regime's repudiation of its predecessor's signature to the Tripartite Pact, and the implications of armed resistance. Would the Yugoslavs have come out so strongly if they weren't certain of their strength, certain of English support, certain of a continuous stream of tanks and aeroplanes arriving? And with the Greek Army holding its own so well against the Italians, with the British beach-head established on the Greek peninsula — really, could there be any doubt as to the outcome?

In the barracks that night even the most fanatic card-players had no use for their cards. And later on the barrack commanders had their hands full trying to silence the men long after the lights had gone out. Optimism was wide-

spread. Considered opinions were rare, and unwanted. This first night was given over to enthusiasm.

"Syria will go along with De Gaulle. Turkey will join in. One of these mornings you'll see French soldiers at the gate of the camp."

"You think we'll have to wait till they get here? They'll come over in 'planes and drop weapons for us; we ought to start organizing right now!"

At eight-thirty there was a sensational piece of news. A yarn to end all yarns, but one with an absolutely scientific foundation. Even the unbelievers and sceptics became excited over it. The "medium of the chief surgeon" had only just asserted that by June at the latest the Allies would reach the camp.

The "medium of the chief surgeon" was a rather recent creation but nevertheless an imposing piece of hocus-pocus. It was called "medium of the chief surgeon" because the title gave it added prestige. As a matter of fact the chief surgeon didn't have much to do with it; however, the hypnotic séances, in which a heavily bearded sergeant, "something out of a hospital" in private life, put a sickly little private into trances and made him say extraordinary things, usually occurred in the camp infirmary, and the French doctors were often present. The doctors themselves had affirmed that it was "something of a scientific nature" and that there was no trick about it. Some people even claimed that a striking proof of the medium's talents had been shown. Several weeks back he had been put into a trance and confronted with a man who was planning an escape, a man about whom, of course, he knew nothing; questioned as to where the man would be on March 15, he had said, "In camp."

"And on March 25?" asked the hypnotist.

"On a road far from here."

"And on March 30?"

The medium had promptly replied, "In Barrack 60."

And lo and behold, that's where the man was on March 30.

When the medium was consulted on what would take place near the camp about June 1, he had said in an almost unintelligible voice: "I see a train arriving at the station. I see French officers getting off. They are not prisoners. Their commanding officer is a colonel. He is Colonel Laurent. They go in the direction of the camp. I see no more German soldiers. I see the tricolour waving over the Kommandantur." The medium could make no more predictions, but had said that he saw "all Germany in chaos". Everyone was forced to admit that it was all very clear, and especially that it was absolutely in keeping with the situation.

The next day, however, the optimism began to yield the floor to a little consideration. In a number of barracks men had obtained maps of the Balkans — no one ever knew how — and the discussions began to take on a more thoughtful tone. In the barrack for foreign volunteers, a weird hodge-podge of strange characters whose identities were safely concealed beneath the ragged uniforms of ordinary privates, a few curious individuals had unearthed a haggard, emaciated, stooped old man with sunken cheeks. He had served with the International Brigade in the Spanish War, and then, after reaching France, had been interned in the concentration camp at Gurs. In order to get out and fight for France, he had given his age as thirty-five, though he had been fifty; now, a second-class private in a German prison camp, he looked well over sixty. This man, a Bulgarian refugee, had been a career officer in his country's army and knew the topography of the Balkans as few in camp did. And in the same barrack had been found, also under the rags of a second-class private, some former Yugoslav officers. They were dragged into the limelight, harried with questions, attacked from all sides. In the end they had to promise to hold a conference the next day in one of the non-com. barracks on the strategic implications of the Balkan war.

That evening, while the sentries were being relieved, the squad trying to force its way through a crowd as dense as the one the day before suddenly found itself caught in a storm

of whistling. Naturally, the German soldiers could not know that this demonstration was only indirectly concerned with them. Lost in the mob of prisoners, wedged in with all the arsenal they were carrying, they must have been rather bewildered at this unexpected manifestation. The radio had just announced the bombing of Belgrade.

Subsequent communiqués also provoked noisy reactions. Ironic laughter greeted the news of German advances, enthusiastic cheers the account of "atrocities" committed by the "Serbs" on "innocent citizens of German blood".

The offices of the Kommandantur close down some time before the daily news broadcast. After five o'clock no officer lingers around camp, which remains in the hands of the *Stabsfeldwebel* commanding the police station, and his tiny garrison. Didn't these guards realize the nature of the demonstrations that thereafter occurred every evening during the broadcast? In spite of their ignorance of French, it seems highly improbable; but it is certain that these continual outbursts never resulted in any action by the Kommandantur, nor even by the camp Gestapo, usually so prompt to inflict penalties in similar circumstances.

The fact is that the Germans in camp, at any rate those of humble station — barrack commander, master craftsmen, employees in the Kommandantur — felt very uneasy about this new war. And it was significant that most of them came to the prisoners for information on the situation.

The official sources of information available to the prisoners were the German broadcasts in French, which were often more complete than the German language broadcasts, and the German press, that is, when the guards brought them newspapers. But, except for a few fanatical Nazis, the guards themselves never read these papers.

"What's the use?" Herr Weberstedt used to say. "There's never anything but lies in them."

The sergeant in charge of the parcel-post service, questioned one day by "his" prisoners on the contents of the morning paper, had given them a reply that became famous:

"The newspaper? I never read it. And I've told my

wife that if I die I don't want her to insert a death notice, for if people happen to see it in one of our rags they'll be sure to say it's a lie."

These men continued not to read their papers. Every day they would bring them to the prisoners without having unfolded them. But a half-hour later they would casually return and ask the barrack interpreters whether there was anything new.

"The real show's starting now," Herr Weberstedt would say. "It's no longer the walk-over of '40. The youngsters who think they only have to show themselves to win are going to get a surprise in the Balkans. They'll be going through something of what we went through in '14 to '18."

However, his predictions were not coming true. The Croatian part of Yugoslavia seemed to be going under rapidly before the German invasion; more and more detailed reports were circulating about anti-Yugoslav insurrections by the Ustachis. The Germans were advancing from all sides in a vast encircling movement. In the north they came from Austria; in the east from Hungary and Rumania; an army based on Bulgaria was trying to drive a wedge between Yugoslavia and Greece.

The foreign volunteers from the Balkans began to show their uneasiness. Popoff, the Bulgarian, was full of gloomy prophecies.

"If they break through at Nish and cut the two countries off from each other, and then if in Greece they reach the plain along the Aegean, the situation will become difficult."

At this point it was almost necessary to rescue him from the Yugoslavs. How could he even think of their breaking through at Nish?

"You don't seem to know what you're talking about. That's a section where it's impossible to break through, especially not the *boches*. And besides, we Yugoslavs don't get beaten like that."

But nevertheless they admitted that "it might be very difficult".

"Never mind, even if they occupy the whole country,

the war will go on. As long as there are men, they'll fight. Our country will show the world what it can do."

"Sure, and what about the English?" The majority of the French didn't even want to admit the thought of a partial defeat. Their hopes were too high. "And look at the English, with their 200,000 men and all the modern armament, the 'planes and tanks? Didn't you hear what the radio said?"

The German radio, it was true, had spoken of a huge English invasion army. This news had strongly intensified the current of optimism among the men.

"Now that the English have got another beach-head on the Continent, you don't think they're going to let it go, do you? It's too important. And what about us? What would happen to us if things went bad?"

Popoff had become very unpopular, and in the non-com. barrack, where he had just fulfilled his promise to reveal the topography of the battlefield, his position was strongly attacked. Yet he defended it with arguments that seemed quite sound.

"I hope you're right. But have you ever seen a country, a little country without resources, hold out for very long when almost completely encircled? And with the internal dissension that exists? I tell you that if the Germans succeed in cutting Yugoslavia off from Greece then it's all over. And they can take their time about it. The story of the 200,000 English is a lie; you ought to know German propaganda by now when you hear it. And even supposing it's true; the Germans will throw in double that, triple, or quintuple if they have to."

Popoff retired to the shadows of his barrack. His place as "Balkan expert" was quickly taken by a Greek shoemaker, also a foreign volunteer, as incompetent as he was voluble. He had his hour of fame, and was much sought after for his long speeches, delivered in a lisp but brimming over with enthusiasm.

A few days later the camp welcomed the first Yugoslav prisoners.

They arrived in long files, dirty, drab grey, haggard, dishevelled. There were few young men among them. The uniforms they bore were old and worn. Many were in civilian clothes, or wore a rig that was half military, half peasant. The majority were troops of the second reserve, captured at their posts in Croatia in the great flanking movement launched by the Germans from Hungary. There were three thousand of them. Peasants for the most part, in an incredible state of misery. Frenchmen who had witnessed or helped in the registration process asserted that they had never seen such poverty.

A great many of the new arrivals bore a large swastika on their grey caps. A group of prisoners, including, among others, many customs guards of the Austro-Croatian frontier, declared they were "of German blood" and obtained a separate barrack.

"Croats," explained several officers whom chance had placed in the same camp as the men. "Don't judge our army by the mob you see here. Most of them didn't want to fight, and some of them fired on us from behind. But Croatia is not Yugoslavia. And the war isn't over yet. Moreover, even in Croatia, there were contingents who fought extremely well. But the fifth column was too well organized there. And then our mobilization had barely started."

These words somewhat lessened the effect of the recent happenings on the camp's morale. There was a meeting that night of all men who could be trusted.

"We must try to help the poor devils. They're dying from hunger. They're trembling. We ought to take up a collection. But how are we going to distinguish the pro-Nazis, the Ustachis, the fifth column, from the real Yugoslavs?"

This question was resolved more quickly than had been expected. The day after their arrival, the new prisoners who had not registered as being of German blood or who had been denied this privilege, were sent off on Kommando work. They had scarcely had time to rest. The fifth column

remained in camp to wait for the arrival of the train that was to repatriate them. There were about three hundred of them.

The consolation held forth by the few officers of this convoy soon disappeared under an avalanche of bad news that poured from the radio. Belgrade fell. Nish. Sarajevo. The Italians, defeated in the beginning, gained easy laurels over weak detachments that were cut off from all supplies. The invasion rolled into Greece, swallowed up Thessalonica, then even the Peloponnesus. A deep pall settled over the camp. The triumphal fanfares of the special communiqués broadcast over the radio, the swastika flags hoisted on days when "great victories" were won, the church bells — to be spared all this, the men would have preferred to be deaf and dumb.

One day there was a great hubbub in camp. By order of the Kommandantur, eight barracks were to be vacated at once: a new convoy of Yugoslav prisoners was expected that afternoon. There were to be three thousand men, and at least five hundred of them officers.

Officers? Why, yes, there were even generals among them, the clerks at the Kommandantur asserted.

In the early afternoon groups of prisoners began to form along the road. Broken up here and there by the dogs, they immediately formed again; and, when the expected hour for the convoy's arrival was at hand, a dense, solid wall of French soldiers stretched all the way down the main road of the camp.

An order spread through the ranks: "Look smart now! Only those who are well dressed in the first row. As the officers go by, stand at attention!"

Certain barracks had spontaneously designated non-commissioned officers to command them. Their men were faultlessly aligned in five rows, one behind the other; the non-coms. were arrayed in clean tunics and belts borrowed from their comrades. This example was emulated all the way down the line. A motley, slovenly crowd, wearing torn and unwashed uniforms, was suddenly transformed into a military formation.

This spontaneous action can best be described as the sudden awakening of men who, reduced to the level of tramps, all at once become aware of the fact that they are not there through accident but to represent a cause, their own. There was all the boldness of revolt in this gesture: the German officers may punish us all they want; we will only salute them when they compel us to. But we will salute the Yugoslav officers being brought here, and welcome them as comrades in arms, because they have fought for the same cause as our own, because they have fought against the Germans, because they have fought for us.

"Attention! The convoy is entering the camp."

Preceded by twenty-four generals, the General Staff captured at Sarajevo, the convoy advanced toward the barracks prepared for them. The officers, at first stupefied by the sight of the dense ranks of French soldiers, quickly showed their gratitude for this mute but stirring demonstration behind barbed wire and German bayonets; they recognized the spirit of resistance shining forth as the symbol of brotherhood for all those defeated but not conquered.

Just as the Polish prisoners had greeted us on our arrival and inspired us with some of their pride, so we told our Yugoslav allies: "We are not beaten. We shall rise again."

For that matter the Yugoslavs, though moved by our reception, had no need of encouragement.

"The war in Yugoslavia is continuing and will continue," said a major to a group of French prisoners crowding around him. "Tell your comrades that large units have retired into the mountains in good order, with all their arms, and that they have enough supplies to hang on for years if necessary. You'll soon hear talk of them."

Crammed into a barrack that had formerly been occupied by French prisoners, over four hundred Yugoslav officers were overwhelmed by a friendly invasion of the Frenchmen. The men appeared loaded down with gifts voluntarily

offered by different barracks, gifts collected from everywhere, from recently arrived parcels or even from small reserves painfully built up. They were wild with joy, delirious at being able to speak to friends who, come to share their own misfortune, seemed to them at once a symbol and a promise.

The news brought by the Yugoslavs about the crushingly inferior conditions under which they had fought and continued to fight, far from lessening the enthusiasm and dimming the hope of the French prisoners, had the opposite effect and increased their affection for the new arrivals. At the same time, it made clear how they had been deceived by German propaganda.

"Our mobilization had only just begun and was furthermore made extremely difficult by the policy of the preceding governments," said a general who, like many of the Yugoslav officers, spoke perfect French.

"Is it true, sir, that Yugoslavia was persuaded to resist by British promises and that the British coldly abandoned you?"

"No, that's absolutely untrue. Resistance was fomented by a tremendous popular movement that swept everything before it. The General Staff was aware of the country's perilous military position; we also knew that England, with whom as a matter of fact there had not even been any military talks, could do nothing to give us any effective help, especially on such short notice. On the other hand, the report of Yugoslav aggression against Germany is a complete falsehood. We were attacked at a time, just after the *coup d'état*, when we had no time to prepare an adequate defence.

"Look here, do you want another example of German propaganda? It should interest you, and I'd like you to repeat it to your comrades. At the entrance of the camp we were harangued by a German major who told us: 'You will find a lot of Frenchmen here. Don't be surprised to see them, for, as you know, Germany has released nearly all French prisoners. The ones you will see are firebrands whom we are holding at the express wish of the French

Government. And don't let yourselves be influenced by them ; they are all notorious liars.' Well, what do you say to that ? ”

A great deal was said. The news made a sensation in camp. And the prisoners remembered the story of the Belgians which the Germans had told them when they first arrived in camp, those Belgians who were “ immediately freed after the surrender of their country ”.

The collection for the Yugoslavs that was carried out among the French prisoners bore surprising results. It was hard to believe that such quantities of food, linen, and useful articles of every kind were to be found in camp. Every barrack collected dozens of boxes and bags ; the men literally stripped themselves so as to demonstrate their solidarity and their gratitude. The most badly provided barrack donated the most — Barrack 60.

Evidently there were going to be difficulties in distributing all this. To whom were the gifts to be turned over ? There was hardly a single man in the ranks who could understand a word of French. Most of them were Serbs from the mountainous regions of the south, men who had fought like demons, their officers said. In spite of the difficulties in communication, the French soldiers had immediately begun to fraternize with these men, who, exhausted and famished after twenty-four hours of travelling, reminded them of their own condition when they had reached camp. It was finally decided to hand over the gifts to a committee elected from the Yugoslav officers as well as men.

The Germans looked upon all this with a jaundiced eye. When a delegation of Yugoslav officers paid a visit to the French barracks in order to express the thanks of their men, a series of demonstrations broke out which were described as “ anti-German ” by the Nazi authorities ; the Yugoslav officers were first interned in their barracks and then one night, without any warning, removed to “ an unknown destination ”. The men soon followed them.

After that, Yugoslav prisoners did not spend more than a few hours in the French camp. Whether this was due to

the urgent need for labour or to the fear of demonstrations, or to a combination of the two, it was nevertheless true that, from then on, all prisoners' convoys from the Balkans were met at the station by German soldiers, each of whom had orders to take a certain number of men to a designated Kommando. Worn out by weeks of fighting, weak with fatigue and hunger, the men remained in camp only for as long as was necessary to be registered and vaccinated, and immediately after were escorted to where they had been assigned to work.

* * *

May 1941. The Balkan war was over, the Yugoslav regular army dismembered, defeated, captured. Greece had fallen, and Crete was about to succumb.

But in the camps the fires were not extinguished. The sudden, flaming hope that had shot up one April day at the news of war on the German frontier and all the hidden emotions thereby released, the spirit of revolt and the yearning to share once more, with a new awareness, in a struggle the prisoners now knew was their own — all that still was there. And, while Rudolf Hess tried to save the Nazi empire from the revolt he had heard rumbling beneath his feet ; while from all parts of Germany trains were converging on the Russian border, bearing the fine flower of German youth toward the furnace that would consume it — behind the barbed wire surrounding the prison camps, one year after her defeat, France was rising up once more.

XVIII

Homecoming

THE STAGE WAS SET FOR GREAT DOINGS. FROM EVERY observation tower in camp the searchlights blazed a dazzling path through the pitch-black night to focus on one narrow circle of the main road, where some two hundred and fifty prisoners huddled together under the harsh glare. All about them, straining at their leashes, were big, ferocious-looking police dogs, and farther back, concealed in the shadows, stood a cordon of fully armed soldiers.

For this was the big night, the night of departure, and the overlords must be certain that no unwanted gate-crashers would augment the number of prisoners they had regretfully given up, after endless conflicts and subterranean struggles. They were being released because there was nothing more the overlords could get out of them. For these were men who had been worn down by hunger and Kommando, whom barbed wire and barrack life had sapped dry of vitality; they were the tubercular, the cancerous, the cardiacs, the cripples. There was one who had left his leg in a forest where he had been made to chop trees; another had lost his hand in a planing machine at a Messerschmitt factory; a third had an arm missing. Physical wrecks of every description were gathered there; the men resembled a group of illustrations for a surgical handbook. No, the overlords would most certainly not lose anything by releasing them.

But were they really going to be released? There seemed to be no hurry about the proceedings. It was four o'clock in the morning, and the men had already been on their feet for two hours. What were they waiting for? Some of the men spoke of another medical inspection, a reclassification by the Gestapo, or an examination by the Labour bureau.

One never knew. Out of three hundred men listed for

repatriation, fifty-three had been withdrawn from the convoy only last night, without any explanation or plausible justification, on the very eve of departure, when for weeks they had carried around the magical certificate bearing the word "liberation".

Five o'clock. Half-past five. A light went on in one of the offices in the Kommandantur.

"First fifty men, forward march. Prepare for identification and search."

A large hall. At the entrance was a table, presided over by *Stabsfeldwebel* Werner, head of the filing office, flanked by two men in civilian clothes.

A careful, methodical identification followed, based on individual index cards and photographs taken when the prisoners first arrived. From time to time one of the plain-clothes men would put a question. One man, then another, disappeared behind a door; those who were leaving would never see them again.

The search. The men were absolutely forbidden to carry papers, letters, photographs, written or printed matter of any description. Those who had anything of that nature on them would do well to hand it over immediately to the German soldiers searching them. Any man who tried to smuggle papers or letters through would be removed from the convoy.

The search was long and thorough. Several men were obliged to undress; one of them had the lining of his tunic ripped open and even his stripes torn off in search of anything he might have concealed.

Eight o'clock. The last group was leaving the barrack. Two more men had been weeded out, no one knew why. Throughout all this, the men to be repatriated had remained under a tight guard, and nothing had been neglected to isolate them from the rest of the camp and their comrades. But the sifting process was not yet completed.

Still surrounded by the protective ring of dogs and bayonets, the men advanced toward the gate. The gate was half open and a small table barred the way out. There was

another identification, carried out this time by the German non-com. in charge of the muster roll. As each man's number was checked, he passed through the gate. When all had gone through, they were assembled once more before the gate, counted, and then recounted. There were no extras, but there was one less than before : a prisoner had gone out of his mind and objected to leaving. When finally discovered, he had to be taken along by force. Later on he escaped three times from the train, and when the string of coaches was drawn up before the demarcation line at Chalon-sur-Saône, he attracted the fire of German sentries who saw him walking along the tracks at night.

At last, the highway. Seen from outside, the camp became a gigantic grey spider outlined in barbed wire. The men followed the road so often travelled when going to work. At the station a few third-class carriages stood bleakly on a siding. The men were counted for the *n*th time. Fortunately the count came out correct. Even the madman was there, forcibly held by his friends so that he would not try to escape again.

The prisoners climbed on board the train. The German soldiers remained on the tracks, vigilantly watching every approach. No one else could get on or come anywhere near the train. But inside the coaches, instead of the 253 prisoners who had been counted, recounted, identified, and checked over and over, there were now 257 prisoners. Four extras had suddenly appeared, men who had received no medical inspection, no going-over by the Gestapo, no sifting, and no identification.

Leaving camp a few days before the convoy was scheduled to depart, they had stayed hidden near the station till this morning. Then, guided by a German brakeman, they had taken their places in the coaches well before the arrival of their comrades. As they were in uniform like everyone else, the Germans could not tell them from the other passengers. And, with a little added effort, they would eventually arrive in France like the others.

Finally the coaches containing the prisoners were hooked

on to a regular train and the journey had begun. A curious sight met the prisoners: Germany had undergone a great change since they had last contemplated it in June 1940, from behind the bars of their box car. There were few adult men about; instead, women were everywhere, women doing the work in the stations, collecting tickets, working as switchmen at important junction points. They were even doing the heavy, unhealthy jobs: loading and unloading freight cars, cleaning the trains, working on the tracks. And then there were the prisoners. We had never expected to find the country so swarming with them. They were in the fields, in the villages, and in the towns; they were all along the track. We held little interest for them. French prisoners going by were a daily sight to them. Just some more wretches going to a Kommando, they thought.

There were few incidents during the trip. The train sped through Bavaria and Württemberg — peaceful countries not greatly disturbed by R.A.F. bombings. The period of the great raids was yet to come.

We passed a great many troop trains coming from France and headed for the east. For a long time we had heard from other prisoners, working on railway tracks, that these troop movements were becoming more and more frequent, and that ever since January the pace had gradually been accelerating. We saw a tank regiment go by, equipped with Renault tanks, the tanks that had never reached us in '40. We wondered whether they were part of the 750 armoured vehicles which the Nazi press had said were found brand-new and intact in Lyons by troops of the German Reich. Or perhaps they came from the headquarters of the tank regiments at Tarbes. Or possibly they were the first-fruits of collaboration. An artillery regiment went by. French 75's, long 155's, short 155's. Trucks — our trucks. Collaboration seemed like a paying proposition.

In one station, halted alongside of us, were several coaches of unarmed German soldiers guarded by S.S. troops. There were about two hundred of them. Some of them made a peculiar sign to us: passing their forefinger

across their throat, they made a wry face. Condemned deserters? As many as all that? One of them asked us for cigarettes, but we had none ourselves. An S.S. guard came up with a threatening look. The train started out again.

That evening we got out at a small town in Württemberg. Our four extras took the precaution of leaving the train a few hundred yards from the station, on the other side of the track. They would join us again when the convoy left for France.

The assembly camp was the scene of more checking, identification, and counting. Again the count came out all right; our four friends were quietly hiding in an abandoned coach, amply provided with food. One of them was a Polish officer with legendary nerve, who spoke German without an accent and who, in case of complications, would know how to fix things. This, however, would not prevent him from being interned in Vichy France a few days later, at a camp for former members of the Polish Army.

The assembly camp was full of men from other camps being repatriated for reasons of health. Some of them had been waiting there for months until the convoy bound for France was made up, after having waited other months at their own camps, in infirmaries or hospitals, for their transfer to the assembly camp. Two of them had died the day before, and another died during the few days we stayed at the camp.

The news these men gave us was no different from what we brought ourselves. Life in the camps and Kommandos was pretty much the same all over Germany. In every camp the prisoners' morale passed through the same stages. At that time it was high everywhere, but more outspokenly aggressive in the districts visited from time to time by Allied bombers, the messengers of those who were carrying on the fight.

"They ought to come more often and also drop pamphlets on the camps to show the boys that the German stories are lies and that, in spite of Vichy and collaboration, they con-

sider us their friends and don't put us in the same class as the rats who are helping the *boches*."

That was the opinion of men from all camps, no matter where. The French prisoners felt as if they had been abandoned; they followed the news of the war with a passionate interest, but they suffered not only from being far away but also from uncertainty as to whether they were still considered allies by those who could continue the war.

Life in the assembly camp went on monotonously and evenly. Roll-call, midday soup, evening soup, lights out; in between nothing but idleness and waiting. When would we leave? Tomorrow perhaps, or the next day, or in a week, a month. . . . No news, not even the usual camp rumour, no contact with the outside world at all. It was only then that the men realized how, in their camps, they had managed to keep abreast of news in spite of the barbed wire, how complex and well organized had been the numerous bonds they had established with the rest of the world: liaisons with the Kommandos, contacts with men coming from outside, contraband newspapers, reports from clandestine sources, stories in letters, from camp offices, from the infirmary . . .

Here there was nothing. Even the guards were uncommunicative, though they were middle-aged men from that district, Württemberg, men who were more frank, less fanatic than those some of us had known in the central and eastern part of Germany. But the guards were suspicious, not having known us long enough. Weren't there Gestapo spies even among the French prisoners?

One afternoon, however, there was a sensation in camp. We were shut up in our barracks and strictly forbidden to come out. An armed sentry was placed before each door. British prisoners were arriving. There was a strict rule in the prisoners' camps that British prisoners were to be separated from the others. In fact, it very rarely happened that they were sent to the same camp. This was quite obviously not due to a fear on the part of Germany that prisoners of other nationalities would be contaminated: they knew very well what to expect from the men's morale.

But their propaganda for the British took a completely opposite line from that which they conferred on the French ; it would certainly not help matters much if *The Link* and the *Trait d'Union* were read by the same people.

Through the window we saw the new prisoners arriving : about twenty Australian officers. Later we learned they had been captured in Greece. They were young, had an athletic look, and seemed in no way cast down ; they marched very straight, without paying the slightest attention to their guards. But neither did they look at the French prisoners, who, in spite of orders, were clustered at the windows of their barracks. What had the Germans told them about us, and did they believe it ?

The Australians were installed in a barrack. Soon after they came out, still under guard, and returned carrying bed sheets. Bed sheets ! No French prisoner, even an officer, had ever seen a sheet during his captivity. But this wasn't a complete shock to us. We had known for a long time that the English were much better treated than prisoners of other nationalities ; we were also aware that this was not only due to considerations of reciprocity but in large part the result of the German character, which respects only those who make themselves respected.

But we were really staggered when, a little later, we saw a German sergeant bringing the Australians a football ! Still shut up in our barracks, we saw them playing around for an hour, showing a liveliness worthy of far different surroundings. They paid no attention to the German officers, whom regulations compelled them to salute, broke one of the windows in the Kommandantur, and, without turning a hair, had their ball returned by one of the secretaries. Behind them was a country that was fighting, not one that was " collaborating ".

The Germans did not let the French prisoners out until they had carefully shut the Australians into their barrack. There was no way to get at them. The Kommandantur coyly indulged in this little game until after we had departed. Nevertheless, a long message would be delivered to our

friends ; we would not get their answer, but steps had been taken to see that one of us, who was staying behind, would manage to speak to them after we had left.

The train again. Until we got aboard, the number of men had tallied perfectly with the list in possession of the convoy commander. But now, instead of the four anonymous passengers who had been with us on the first stage, there were six in all. The two new additions were men who had escaped from the camp at Sagan, in Silesia, six weeks before ; they were tired of using their feet and had decided to take advantage of the first- and second-class coaches sent by the French authorities.

The Black Forest. Donauschingen. Friedrichshafen. We skirted Lake Constance, passed near the Swiss border, but failed to cross it. It seems that during previous transportations of prisoners there had been sympathetic demonstrations on the part of the Swiss population which incurred the displeasure of the Germans. A special agreement now excluded all trains bearing hospitalized repatriates from supervision by the Red Cross. Vichy France and Germany were collaborating too closely to need any interference by international organizations.

Nightfall. The train bore right to follow the Rhine. The next morning we crossed the bridge at Neu-Breisach. The old steel bridge was gone, blown up during last year's fighting. Signs of the battle were still to be seen everywhere, even on the German bank, where the French artillery and machine-guns had left their mark on the houses. It seemed strange to us that repairs had not yet been made.

Over the temporary bridge across the Rhine. Alsace. The country seemed deserted. Blockhouses in ruins, shell craters, here and there a few ruined houses. Along the track were signs in German, but the rare railwaymen we saw in the distance still wore the same costume they had worn before the invasion. They did not dare answer our waves ; we noticed the frightened looks they gave the German soldiers guarding us.

Mulhouse. An empty station. Not a civilian to be seen. Later we found out that the platforms were cleared before our arrival and that, while our train was stopped, a cordon of police barred all access to the station. There were reasons for these precautions, as we soon found out. The half-hour our train had stopped in the station, the placing of troops before the entrance, were proof enough to spread the news of our passage ahead of us. From the time we left the station we became witnesses of a spectacle that was hard to believe. Filled with amazement and deeply touched, we saw that the windows of the houses along the tracks were black with people ; along the streets and behind the crossing bars were large gatherings who were oblivious of the S.A. troops trying to push them back. Not one of us had believed such a welcome possible. Flowers were thrown into the coaches ; from everywhere came a mounting clamour that was almost hysterical. "*Vive la France ! A bas l'Allemagne !*" All this in front of the soldiers and police of the Third Reich. From behind a barrier, at a place where the train was obliged to slow down, people shouted at us : "Come back quickly, with arms !" "*Vive de Gaulle !*" "Don't forget us !"

The train picked up speed. We looked back and saw the S.A. troops charging the crowd with their sticks. We were too far away to make out the details. This spectacle was repeated in every town and village through which we passed. Before one house, standing all by itself in the country, the whole family had gathered. An old man was waving a large tricolour.

Belfort. Besançon. Everywhere the stations were deserted, but along the track the demonstrations grew in size and volume. As in the prisoners' camps, strange, underground methods of communication must spread news in the occupied sections with unbelievable swiftness.

Just before Dijon, the train stopped in a workers' suburb, outside the station. The track was a little above the level of the street and there was no fence or separation. In spite of the German guards on the train, there was a wild scramble

by the population. And the most astonishing things were offered to us by these workers, who had been reduced to starvation in a district bled white by the occupation — bottles of wine by the hundred, bread, and cheese. An old woman brought a large pail of coffee, which she had made several hours before when the railwaymen had announced our arrival. The proprietress of a grocery across the street from where the train had come to a halt brought us twenty bars of chocolate, which later on gave rise to a noisy argument between our guards, who wanted to buy some, and the proprietress, who coldly told them that she had not seen any chocolate for a year.

At the same time we learned from the donors of all these things that their gifts were in no way a sign of abundance, that they were letting us have the wretched little stocks they had painfully collected in order to send to sons, sweethearts, and fathers in German prison camps. For the first time we learned to our horror how meagre were the rations allowed to the population. Seven ounces of bread a day, and what bread ! It was practically as bad as the bread in camp. And there wasn't even any wine. Lord knows where the wine they brought us came from. We remembered the long lines of French tanker lorries, coming from Béziers, from Bordeaux, from all the wine regions of France, which we had seen inside Germany. Wine provides industrial alcohol of a much finer grade than that extracted from Pomeranian potatoes.

The train moved on again. Dijon. The platform was empty as usual, completely cleared before the arrival of repatriated prisoners. We had just heard that earlier convoys had provoked such turbulent demonstrations that the Germans, weary of suppressing them, had begun to detour the trains from their regular itinerary, send them over unused tracks, and clear everything before them.

Evening. Chalon-sur-Saône. The demarcation line. The train was switched into a siding where we would spend the night. Tomorrow morning there would be the last German inspection, and then the "Free" zone. No more

Germany tomorrow. No one could sleep because of this one thought.

The next day the inspection was carried out in a rather curious fashion. There was no roll-call, no line-up outside the coaches. A German captain, accompanied by a French Army doctor, a colonel, passed through the coaches trying to count the men. Three of the six extras had thought best to jump off the train just before Chalon and try to cross the line individually. The others . . . The first time the captain counted the men, he found two more than his quota showed; the second time there was one man less, and the third time he still hadn't come out even. At this point he gave up in despair and allowed the train to go through, tired of counting and dismayed by the prospect of all the added work a roll-call would involve. Was this the effect of the climate, lethargy, or resignation? Whatever the reason, we pulled into the first station on the other side of the line with three men who did not appear on any list.

On the platform stood a French general who was not a prisoner. A company from a cavalry regiment presented arms. Martial music blared out. The *Marseillaise*.

Were we affected? Yes, a little, but especially overcome by a strange feeling of hope mixed with doubt and anxiety. These were French soldiers. Their uniforms were brilliantly new, uniforms such as we had never worn, either before or during the war. It was the new field-service uniform, we knew, for we had seen millions of them in the store-rooms of the German Army, which had carried them off as war booty. Their guns were 1936 carbines, not the old Lebel 07/15, worn-out relics of the last war which had let us down so badly in '40. What were they thinking about, these beautifully groomed soldiers with white gloves, who were presenting arms so faultlessly, these officers with numerous and obviously recent decorations?

From one of the coach windows a man on crutches, who had lost a leg, called the band sergeant over. Loudly

cheered on by his comrades, he asked him to play the Lorraine March. "We've got some Lorrainers with us. They have a right to hear it."

The sergeant, embarrassed, asked to be excused. His men didn't know it, he said. It was not in their repertory.

The Red Cross was handing out food and cigarettes. Most of the women had husbands in German prison camps. They were asking everyone: "What camp are you from? Did you know So-and-so? How were you treated? And when, oh when, will it be over? When will the others come back?"

The men replied that the Germans were firmly hanging on to the others and would not let them go until they were defeated.

"Defeated? You still think we're going to win? You're still hoping, after all you've been through?" The woman burst into tears. "I don't care any more so long as he comes home quickly."

We were given some pamphlets, specially put out for repatriated prisoners so that they could familiarize themselves with the "New France". Strange titles jumped out at us, titles that might have come straight out of the *Trait d'Union*; titles like "The Army of Occupation", "The Jewish Regime", and so forth.

A tumultuous ugly scene had just broken out on the platform. A group of "Companions of France", the Pétain youth organization, had at this point seen fit to raise a loud and persistent cry of "*Vive Pétain!*" They were answered by a tall, very pale, and heavily bearded lieutenant who wore a private's tunic on which could barely be perceived the two tarnished stripes he had awkwardly sewn on, a pair of ragged riding breeches, frayed puttees, and a pair of boots picked up God knows where. In a thundering voice, echoed by the whole coach, he cried: "*Vive de Gaulle!* Down with collaboration!" The tumult spread to other coaches, and the garrison officers were unable to calm the men.

A captain of the cavalry regiment came up to the bearded lieutenant, who had stepped down on the platform and was

still shouting. A singular conversation ensued.

"The colonel has asked me to speak to you," said the captain. "This scene is very painful to him. He wishes me to tell you that he understands perfectly how you feel. He believes, however, that your attitude is due mainly to the fact that you are not in possession of the necessary information and that your long absence from France prevents you from understanding the situation. Will you allow me to give you some friendly advice? It would be better if you reserved your opinion until you have got your bearings a little more."

In a loud voice the lieutenant replied: "Sir, to me and my friends here, to all of us who speak and have a mission to speak for those of us we have left behind, the situation is clear enough. I have no need of any further information. And I believe I have paid a high enough price to have an opinion and to express it. I say to you, I say it out loud, and I shall say it to no matter whom, that I and my friends and all the prisoners have seen the Germans close enough to know them. If your own experience has not shown you — I don't know where you received it — well, as for us, we are against collaboration, and we are for anyone who continues the war."

"My friend," the captain answered in a confidential tone, "let me say that personally I feel exactly the same way, but, believe me, it's not healthy to speak out too openly nowadays."

"Tell me, sir, am I in France or still in the prison camp? Are you trying to tell me that in my own country I no longer have the right to express my opinion?"

The captain, embarrassed, tried a new tack to get out of an awkward situation. "Just wait a few weeks, and you'll see a bit more clearly what I mean. How do you know that everything we're doing openly isn't just a cover for something else?"

This conversation was passed on from coach to coach and brought forth some violent criticisms. In addition to the joy of seeing France once more we experienced an odd

sensation, as though we had returned to a strange country that was not the one we had looked forward to ; and mixed in with this was a vague inclination to revolt. Was this why our entire journey across non-Occupied France became a series of outbreaks ? There was not a station where the same scenes were not repeated on an increasing scale. At Lyons, " seditious " cries even penetrated to the ears of General Frère, the officer in command of the town.

The military and civilian authorities, however, had long been used to these scenes. Every train bearing repatriated prisoners gave rise to the same demonstrations. They were not taken very seriously because the authorities counted on a number of factors to cool the men's ardour : their weariness, their attention being absorbed by daily worries, and especially their dispersal after demobilization. And, besides, there were all sorts of camps waiting to welcome those who were recalcitrant.

Clermont-Ferrand was where we would get off the train to be demobilized. At a little station just before Clermont, a colonel came on board and passed through the train, making the same speech in every coach. He said that he realized how we felt, understood our attitude against collaboration, but he begged us to be prudent and especially to inform ourselves on the situation as it really was and not to be misled by appearances.

" France, my friends, must do a little scheming, as Germany did after 1918, but put your confidence in the Marshal."

In particular, he begged us to refrain from demonstrating when we arrived in Clermont : there might be a German Army commission at the station. The dream was ended. No more Germans ? The Colonel even warned us that as long as we were in uniform we were obliged to salute them.

And we did salute them. We didn't put as much enthusiasm into it as did some officers we saw, who bore numerous decorations for service behind the lines or for a glorious retreat which they had superbly carried out after

abandoning their troops and which had enabled them to continue a brilliant career in the Clermont garrison. Nor did we maintain the same friendly relations with the German officers that existed between them and flyers in French uniform from the air base at Montferrand ; and it was not our ranks that furnished the volunteers whom the regiments stationed at Clermont sent to Syria a few days later, across Germany and the Balkans, in order to fight for General Dentz. But we still saluted them, every time we happened to run across them unexpectedly when there was no chance to make a detour : German officers seated in cafes and restaurants, members of the armistice commission walking about in uniform, and, most notably, some gentlemen wearing French uniforms but speaking German uncommonly well. For we had no desire to meet with the experience of some recently repatriated French prisoners who were accused by a German officer of not having shown " proper respect ", and as a result, not long after their arrival in " non-Occupied " France, made the acquaintance of French Army prisons.

It was a strange homecoming.

" You say your home is in the Free zone ? Prove it. You will not be demobilized until you do. Bring along a certificate of residence or employment."

" Occupied zone ? You cannot be demobilized until the Germans authorize you to return home. You will have to have a special pass. Oh, you're Jewish ? In that case, my friend, the Germans won't ever let you in. You want to live in the non-Occupied zone ? Well, you'll have to find a job. And see that you get a notarized certificate. In the meanwhile you'll stay in a camp."

" Forbidden zone ? My poor man, I can't do a thing for you. The Germans don't allow anyone to enter. It's a workers' camp for you."

" Foreign volunteers ? Well, I can't demobilize you here. You'll be transferred to the assembly centre at Agen. Polish ? Concentration camp at Auch. Czech ? Camp at Agde.

Nothing I can do. Foreigners can't even be demobilized on presentation of employment certificates. We have no jurisdiction over you. It's not a military matter but a police matter."

Thousands of men, just released from prisoners' camps in Germany, return to France only to pass from one concentration camp to another. It is true that in France they don't have the dogs to contend with. And they will have the satisfaction of being held prisoners by their own country.

The big square in Clermont. A group of repatriated prisoners stand in conversation — a captain, a sergeant, and a few privates. The captain does not look very different from the men; his uniform is no handsomer than theirs. He is a middle-aged man who has been in the last war. Today, as a native of the forbidden zone, he is an outcast, cut off from his house, his family, and his means of livelihood. He feels closer in spirit to the men who went through the same school as himself than to the young officers passing by who salute him in a nonchalant and disapproving manner. Only last night, after a violent dispute with a colonel, he was put out of the officers' mess.

"I've almost come to the conclusion that the men who stayed in Germany are better off than we are," he said. "At least, they have no idea of what's happened to France. Promise me not to write them what you've seen here. It will be better for them not to hear."

"Don't worry, sir. Just you wait. We'll get them yet, not only the Fritzes, but the ones here too."

The "city patrol" passes by. The men abruptly break off their conversation. It's better to be careful what one says. This isn't the Stalag any more.

XIX

Behind the Barbed Wire, Armies are Rising

IN THE PRISON CAMPS, BEHIND THE BARBED WIRE, ARMIES ARE rising. Strange armies. Armies undreamed of in any military textbook. Armies as unorthodox as those of the Russian guerillas, the Yugoslav partisans, the British commandos.

These armies will have something of all those — their improvised form, their popular character, their ferocity, and as with all resistance that dares raise its head in Europe, those who compose them know that they must conquer or die, and that no pardon awaits them if they falter.

But they will bear a special character of their own. For these armies are being recruited on enemy soil, and it is there that they will go into action. It is the enemy himself who recruits them, for by concentrating millions of prisoners in his homeland and by reducing them to the condition of slavery for life, he teaches them that they will only be free if they succeed in freeing themselves.

People who saw the fall of France without realizing its profound significance, those who only saw its external manifestations and who missed the underlying causes and the real trend of the French soldier's reaction in 1940, will find it hard to grasp the evolution that has taken place since then in the Stalags.

It is not due only to wretchedness and bad treatment, which are customary in prison camps. Certainly, living conditions there are terrible. But human beings are infinitely adaptable, and I am convinced that a soul escaped from Dante's Inferno might tell us that, although material conditions in hell are as described by the great Italian authority, that master is mistaken when he discourses on the reactions of the inhabitants. The lost soul would tell us that they have long ago got used to the ways and customs of hell, that they

have discovered that the cauldrons are not all heated to the same pitch and that they have found an increasing number in which existence is bearable ; that the ministering devils are less and less zealous in their activities and that some of them are completely fed-up with the job ; some, indeed, are already to a great extent contaminated by those of the damned entrusted to their care and will even give hidden support to the demands of their charges.

It is not wretchedness, it is not slavery in itself which creates this now universal spirit of resistance and revolt in the prison camps of Frenchmen in Germany. The roots go deeper.

When, in May and June 1940, countless herds of prisoners meekly let themselves be driven along the roads of France to Germany, an astonishing spirit reigned in their ranks. Inasmuch as the men still felt able to discuss things, they expressed neither hatred nor the will to revolt ; they did not even feel any marked pessimism about their individual fate. They had done their duty, they had fought, often very bravely, and in many cases, as yet unrecorded, with epic endurance. They had been defeated, and their defeat had taken on such a character that all further resistance seemed vain. Well, then, they must resign themselves to it, finish with this war which could no longer be won, seek a compromise with the conqueror, continue living somehow. France might be defeated but the fields would still be there, just as they had always been ; the ruined farms would be rebuilt, and anyhow, every man would get back to his wife, his life, and maybe even his roast meat and his red wine. It might be a bit different for factory workers and clerks, but anyway, each man would resume his existence and the rest could wait till later — the essential thing at the moment was to be able to go home, and to achieve that, peace must be signed with the Germans. There were those among the men who, without encountering much opposition, raised the cry of " Hurry up the armistice and cut the talk ". Even the hope, expressed by some among those vast uncounted herds that a pitiless shepherd was driving towards Germany, of the

rapid fall of Paris hardly roused any marked indignation.

The reaction was individualist but not individual. It was, on the contrary, widespread, and it could not be otherwise, for it was the reaction of the peaceable and pacific citizen who had no idea that the whole world had crumbled under his feet. In his mind, still tracing the paths of the past, the losing of a war means nothing worse than defeat on the field of battle. Of total war he had so far seen only one aspect, the military aspect, and had not in the least understood its significance. He was not to understand it until he bore its totalitarian burden and felt himself trapped in its tentacles. As yet, for him, defeat was the business not of the individual but of the State — it had always been like that, why should it now be otherwise? France would come to an arrangement with Germany, would cede this or that, would even pay something to get back the prisoners, and after that, life would go on as before; it might be a bit harder but there would be no noticeable change.

The armistice was signed. A week passed, two, three. A month. Two. The prisoners were not set free. Instead of soldiers leaving, there were new arrivals, "intake" as they called them in camp. And with the new prisoners came news from France, showing that not only had material life there quickly altered but so had the moral atmosphere; that not only had roast meat and red wine disappeared, but also individual liberty; and that the fields, even though they might look the same, could no longer be farmed as usual, since they were subject to the orders of a German agricultural boss. That and much else finished by shaking the simplest souls, and made them doubt their sanity. What was happening, where did they stand? Had they not for months, like sleep-walkers, walked upon roofs with slippery slopes while thinking themselves on solid earth? Would they ever get back to France, and would it still be the France they knew? For already, not content with looting, the Germans were setting to work to dislocate the country. The prisoners saw their very quality as Frenchmen denied and realized that they must fight hard not to be transformed

into instruments against their country.

They were at that stage of their apprenticeship when one day the Germans set about putting them to work, on farms, in shipyards and factories. It was ruthless and final : they no longer owned themselves. They knew then that they had become the spoils of war like the uniforms they wore and the civilian clothes they had left at home and which perhaps they would never wear again. They were no longer persons but objects. Slaves. And it was in that moment that total war began for them, for it was only in that moment that they realized it !

Total war ? It can be given scholarly and exhaustive definition. But for the prisoner its significance is expressed and exhausted in a single, monumental statement : I am a slave and I shall remain one until the moment when victory changes sides. And the stake is not a question of national honour, it isn't even the degree of comfort in personal existence, but the stake is life itself, my own and that of all who are not Nazis.

To disperse throughout a country at war, right into its war factories, a mass of millions of prisoners from enemy armies — was not that sure madness ? To teach that mass that its function was to serve as instrument for its own enslavement, is not that simply a call to arms ?

In his book *You Can't Do Business with Hitler*, Douglas Miller asks how the Germans can imagine that a Frenchman, a Czech, or a Dane could gladly accept the role which the Nazi doctrine assigns to all those who do not belong to the *Herrenrasse*. The answer is very simple : no Nazi has ever asked himself that question. Gladly or not, all who are not Germans belong to inferior races and are born to serve the "Aryan masters". It is all the more so for those of them who are prisoners. To realize this and to understand his situation, a prisoner in Germany need not have read Rosenberg's *Myth of the Twentieth Century* : a single look from one of those Nazi officers on whom his fate depends, is proof that the master of the hour has never dreamed that the

prisoner could be or could ever have been or could ever be again — a man.

And apart from that, the Third Reich needs his labour. It cannot live without that labour.

How can the factories replace the men who have gone to the front when, without the immense and unforeseen needs of the Russian campaign, the manufacture of synthetic products alone calls for a considerable increase in the labour force? How can they maintain and even increase war production when machines and workers are worn out and output keeps falling? How can they ensure the transport of raw materials, of war material, of provisions for the armies, the continual passage of hundreds of thousands of men across the whole European continent, with a railway system whose tracks are worn unsafe, whose rolling-stock has deteriorated and has never been repaired, whose engines pant and are too few, except by increasing the number of men employed on the line and in the railway yards? Labour, more labour, and yet more labour, whether from declared foes or from prisoners. . . . Of course it means danger, but for the moment there are other and greater dangers than those of men in revolt — first, the revolt in production must be mastered. For years Nazi Germany has lived from day to day. The mechanism which functioned so well so long as everything went according to plan, has gone wrong now that the victory period is ended. When France fell, Britain should have surrendered, but it did not, and the Third Reich had to begin living not on the gains of war but on its own reserves. That lasted a year, more or less, and when stocks were exhausted, others had to be found by attacking Russia, scheduled to succumb in six weeks. But Russia did not succumb, and far from augmenting the reserves of the Third Reich, it forced the Nazis to dip into capital. Today Germany lives by shifts; to fill one gap it creates another. To hold the outer front at all it must imperil the home front by using prisoners to keep up production.

Take any French soldier and put him through the stages

of apprenticeship which the Third Reich makes him undergo. Imagine that man, a farmer from the South, a workman from the North, a Paris clerk, behind barbed wire in a prison camp in Eastern Germany, or at a factory bench somewhere in Berlin, or Munich, or in the Ruhr, or reduced to the status of serf on an isolated farm, or condemned to lay railway lines in some desolate region, along with a hundred other slaves. Now imagine that this man has understood that he will be condemned to this existence for his whole life, that the longed-for armistice of June 1940 was a trap, that peace with Nazi Germany, for which he may have wished after the collapse of the French Army, would only perpetuate his state. He knows that the "armistice" period in which he lives is only a feeble foretaste of the "German peace". He knows that, even if he were set free after that peace, it would only be to return to a country which would be no longer his, and to live there a life which would be little better than that which he endures as a prisoner. How do you suppose this man will react ?

In asking yourself this question, do not forget that he is not alone. He is surrounded by thousands of comrades who have undergone and are undergoing the same trials. He knows that, besides his immediate fellows, there are thousands of others in the camps, the workshops, the factories around him ; that, besides the French soldiers, the Third Reich maintains as slaves on its soil prisoners of war of all the European nations — Poles, Belgians, Britons, Yugoslavs, Russians ; his hopes, he knows well, are theirs, his fate is theirs, as it is and will be that of that countless mass of civilian deportees, garnered from all corners of Europe, who live and die around him.

Trying to imagine this man's reaction, think also of the fact that almost always his very condition of being a working prisoner puts him in contact with Germans. Not with those young gods of war whom he knows from the French campaign and whom you have seen on the screen, but with those beasts of burden ignored by propaganda films, who toil in the factories and workshops ; with ex-soldiers from the last

war who guard the working parties and whom even the martial uniforms of conquerors can't make into film material; with elderly civilians, tired and exhausted by two wars, by inflation, by unemployment and ersatz and, last but not least, by bombing — all this innumerable grey mass behind the scenes whom the Hitler circus fails to amuse and who find the bread offered by the regime ever scarcer and more indigestible.

That, too, German civilians, workmen, German soldiers of the last war, elderly now and tired, all that is part of the apprenticeship of total war forced on our Frenchman by the Third Reich. That aspect of his apprenticeship is certainly not the least important. For the Germany which, seen from outside, on the battlefields of 1939-40, seemed invincible, a mighty, united front, shows the prisoner who sees it from within an aspect full of contradictions, of discontent, of pessimism, and even of despair. For the man who has realized that he will only live if that which holds him in slavery dies, for the man who knows that it is his own fate which is at stake in the war, this is more than encouragement, it is incentive.

Contradictions, discontent, pessimism, even despair. . . . Do you know that, in June 1940, at the moment of the greatest German victory and when all seemed lost, there were German deserters on certain sectors of what was left of the French front? You don't know it, for those who lived through that episode are prisoners.

The defeatism today so widespread in Germany dates from much earlier than the Russian campaign. You cannot know that. But the prisoners know it.

They enjoy a continuous close-up of the curious functioning of German morale. The German victory in the Balkans, their 1940-41 success in Libya, do you know what these did to German morale, long before the Russian reverses? I will tell you, or rather I will quote Herr Weberstedt, who for a year was the German commandant of my barrack. "Yugoslavia, Greece, Crete, what use are they to us? We don't eat any better, far from it. . . . What about all our

losses? And what do we stand to gain in North Africa? No Führer can answer that one. All these victories only prolong the war, and the end will only be all the worse. It's like 1914-18; it was the same then — we won all the battles and lost the war. *Wir werden uns wieder einmal zu Tode siegen* (We shall win ourselves to death again.) The English are artful. They're drawing us further and further on, they're making the war last until they're strong enough to fall on us without too much risk. And meanwhile they're on the way to starving us with all these prisoners we've taken."

These words date from the beginning of 1941. Every prisoner can contribute a large number of similar conversations. Of conversations going even further. I can tell you of the fat old fellow who guarded our small working party with fixed bayonet, and who with his own money and against all regulations bought us beer every day and continually tried to make us understand that he hated the Nazis at least as much as we did ourselves. I can instance the railway worker who naïvely reproached us for the French capitulation in June 1940. Astounding numbers of guards were haunted by the obsession that those whom they guarded would soon turn their gaolers.

And the civilians . . . furtively picking up what falls to the ground when prisoners in the railway stations unload the trucks carrying Red Cross parcels, coming up to the prisoners and lamenting their short rations and offering fantastic sums for a tin of bully. The workers in the factories, tired out, hungry, exhausted, not attempting to conceal from the prisoners their discontent or their ever-falling output. . . . Other civilians, too, remembering in their grey, sad, hopeless existence what the last war brought them, see today the approach of the end of the victory period and fear that all will be branded as equally guilty. . . . The prisoners see the German civil population in all circumstances, and know their reactions not only to problems of the daily round but at moments of crisis when carefully camouflaged souls are

laid bare, moments, for example, when air-raid alerts herald Germany's judgment day.

I cite an incident, ancient history because it dates from the end of 1940, but something which gave me a clearer insight into German morale and a more concrete picture of what the collapse of the Nazi regime would be than I could have got from all the theories in the world. When the sirens gave the alert one night in a remote country district, the civilians from all the villages round about, old men, women, and children, came and sought refuge round the barbed wire of our prison camp.

Civilians are forbidden to approach the camps. But *verbotens* mean nothing in a moment of panic! Then, in a black and trackless sky, we heard the throb of the messengers of hope: from the distant town came the sound of explosions; imprisoned in our barracks, we shouted for joy ("I don't care if it hits me; *nom de Dieu*, it can drop where it likes, I don't care so long as *they* get it in the neck!"); in the surrounding roads and fields ran the dogs which the Kommandantur had let loose to prevent any untoward manifestations. Outside our camp, outside this one brightly lighted spot in the general black-out, a scene was being played which we knew would before long be enacted on a much greater and bloodier scale, with vast, immeasurable consequences, and with OUR HELP, through the whole extent of German territory: it was the spectacle of human beings pushed to the limit where fear and suffering cause them to lose their dread of the powers that be and, forgetting soldiers, police, and even Nazi gunmen, to tear down the structure of their bondage, and bring crashing the very seat of tyranny. . . .

That night's experience did not last long, but the spectacle of the terrified civilians clinging to the barbed wire will never be effaced from the minds of the French prisoners. For on that night they saw the shadow cast by Germany's great final panic.

Behind the barbed wire in Germany, armies are rising.

Armies of men to whom years of slavery have taught the price of liberty.

Armies of men whom the enemy himself has taught that it is each man's fate, each man's humanity which is at stake in this war.

That is what gives them their strength. More than in all their millions, more than in their being within the enemy citadel, the might of these new armies lies in the moral driving force that urges them into being.

We saw the beginning of the birth of these armies. On Europe's blood-soaked soil, laced with barbed wire, studded with execution blocks and gallows, their powerful roots go deep into the earth.

They will not be torn out, and nothing and no one can stop their growth.

For they are armies born of the revolt of human dignity.

THE END

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